



Innovator Spotlight: Fredros Okumu

Director of Science, Ifakara Health Institute
Combating Zika & Future Threats Grand Challenge



Q: What is your role at the Ifakara Health Institute?

A: My role is Director of Science at Ifakara. I oversee and coordinate the scientific strategy and partnerships for the growth of our research and training programs. Our mission is to improve people's health and wellbeing through research, training, and services.

Q: How have you and your team worked with USAID, particularly through the Combating Zika & Future Threats Grand Challenge?

A: We have a wonderful partnership with USAID, through the Combating Zika and Future Threats Grand Challenge. Our work focuses on developing highly scalable and low-cost mosquito-repellent sandals that provide round-the-clock protection against mosquito-borne diseases. These include, malaria, Zika, dengue fever and also yellow fever and lymphatic filariasis. Beyond this, our institute has several other initiatives jointly with USAID. Mosquitoes love biting people on their legs. This project exploits that phenomenon to create a scalable health product for low-income communities, by adding protective treatments to footwear.



Photo credit: Ifakara Health Institute

Q: What makes you passionate about your work?

A: It's incredible working with the team at Ifakara. They all understand and are graciously focused on our mission to improve people's health and wellbeing. Ifakara Health Institute is not a typical employer, but rather a platform for young people to come and participate in this shared mission. We are mostly a local Tanzanian organization, but with a regional mandate and an international footprint. This is thus the best opportunity I could have to participate in global health at this moment. I learn new things everyday, mostly from the young stars on the team.

Q: What topic(s) in global health interest(s) you the most and why?

A: At the moment, I am mostly focused on malaria control and elimination, but I am also keen on the power of innovation to address major global health challenges including both communicable and non-communicable diseases. We have a big focus also on training more scientists and future innovators.

Favorite Quote: "What does a man gain if he inherits all prosperity but is in poor health?"

(a Fredros adaptation of the biblical saying in Matthew 16:26)

Fredros was recently [named by Quartz Africa](#) as one of 30 of the most "ambitious and imaginative minds" in Africa.