

## Reflections on My ELAAD Fellowship Experience

### By Grace Musolo, Inaugural ELAAD Fellow

I still remember the moment I came across the call for applications for the ELAAD Fellowship Program. Without hesitation, I submitted my application — drawn by a deep-desire to further hone my diplomatic skills, grounded in my International Relations background from the United States International University-Africa, and to build lasting connections across the continent and beyond.

Looking back, it's truly a full-circle moment to reflect on the journey that began with the ELAAD application and has now come to a meaningful close, nearly two years later.

I am deeply honored to have been one of only two Kenyans alongside Shadrack Osero — selected as Inaugural Fellows of the ELAAD Programme. We successfully completed the six-month program, and the experience has been nothing short of transformative.

I had the privilege of engaging with a dynamic and talented cohort of fellows from across 17 African countries, all passionate about diplomacy and development. Together, we tackled both individual and group projects that required us to think critically, apply creativity, and confront emerging policy challenges with innovative approaches.

Beyond technical skills, the fellowship nurtured crucial soft skills — leadership, communication, and collaboration. I'm especially grateful to Dr. David Mickler, Dean Global, Africa and Director for the Centre for Australia and Africa Relations, the Curtin University team, and the Australian High Commission for opening doors to enriching experiences, including the courtesy visit in Nairobi (February 2023 & June 2023), the One World Media Summit (September 2023), and the Australia Alumni Event (September 2023) hosted by the Australian High Commission.

A particularly rewarding aspect of the fellowship was contributing to policy dialogues alongside esteemed scholars and ambassadors. Through profound discussions, readings, and engagement with policy briefs on Australia–Kenya relations, I gained fresh perspectives and deepened my understanding of international cooperation.

As I reflect, I carry forward two key lessons:

- **Step forward and Embrace the Call** – With the guidance of my direct boss, Brig (Rtd) Dr. Robert Kabage, PhD, I embraced the call and this stirred a great sense of purpose. Navigating the five-hour time difference between Australia and Kenya, I had to intentionally balance my professional responsibilities with the demands of the fellowship. The program demanded intellectual curiosity, commitment to policy dialogue, and an openness to explore complex geopolitical issues. Each session became a puzzle and an opportunity to dissect challenges, identify opportunities, and learn from brilliant minds around me. I leaned into this challenge wholeheartedly.

- **Put in the Effort and Grow** – Everyone entered the fellowship with unique goals. Mine was to sharpen my diplomatic acumen. I committed to every assignment, actively engaged with Australian culture, and sought to learn at every turn. The result was a deeply gratifying and enriching experience. I encourage future fellows to step beyond their comfort zones — the world of diplomacy is waiting, and ELAAD is a powerful entry point.

As I conclude my heartfelt gratitude goes to Dr. David Mickler, AAUN Team, the Curtin University and University of Nairobi fraternity for making this journey possible and for fostering meaningful bridges between Australian and African peers. The ELAAD Fellowship was more than a program — it was a transformative space to grow, connect, and dream.