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Background

“We are just ordinary people. We don’t know which way to go” – John Legend.

- I am a PhD candidate from Nigeria.
- I had my undergraduate education in Nigeria, after which I moved to the United Kingdom for my MSc and PhD.
- My background is Medicine and Surgery (which I studied in Nigeria). However my MSc was in International Health and Management and I am presently a third year PhD student.
- I have made (or I am making) the transition from one country to another and from clinical practice to academia.
- I would like to share my journey with you and hope that in some way, you can learn from some of my experiences. I also hope that this sharing process helps me also.

The luxury of choice

- Growing up, I did not have the luxury of choice.
- I grew up in a developing country where career choices were very limited. You had to do something 'prestigious' such as Medicine, Law or Engineering.
- So when I chose medicine, it seemed the right thing for a student who showed promise in science.
- After studying medicine, I wanted to continue with clinical medicine and become a consultant paediatrician in my native country (Nigeria), but the residency slots were few.
- Then the opportunity for a Masters in International Health in Aberdeen came up and I took it.
- This story may resonate with some students from other developing countries. This perceived lack of the luxury of choice would affect the way I felt about transitioning stages later in life.
- I would continually look over my shoulder and wonder if I would have made another career choice if I had been given other choices.



Global learning is a journey

- Moving to the UK was a turning point in my Journey. I was moving from a culture I was comfortable with to another I knew almost nothing about and this was daunting.
- **“Move out of your comfort zone. You can only grow if you are willing to feel awkward and uncomfortable when you try something new” - Brian Tracy.**
- Another thing that changed was the availability of different possible choices. I had moved from a place where I had limited choices to another with very many different possible pathways.
- This did not make choosing any easier as I would spend a long time wondering how differently everything would have turned out if I had chosen one of the other alternative careers.
- How did I transition from MSc to PhD? My research was on nutrition and since I enjoyed it and did so well in it, it made a lot of sense to continue with Nutrition in the PhD. In a way, it was building focus and expertise in one particular area.
- Was it an easy decision? NO.
- I have enjoyed living in Aberdeen, made a lot of friends and I am learning a lot. I also work part-time with the Centre for Sustainable International Development (CSID), University of Aberdeen.



Soft skills vs. Hard skills

- I attended a seminar recently where a top employer gave a talk about what employers look for when interviewing for positions.
- The skills they look for are soft skills rather than hard skills. For example, writing, communication (both vertical and horizontal), strategic planning, project development and leadership skills are usually preferred to 'Hard skills' that are specific to certain disciplines.
- I think this is very important to consider while transitioning. Many of these skills can be learnt in any discipline and maybe instead of wondering if we are in the right discipline, the focus should be on if we are learning what we should be learning.

Transitioning Tips

- I attended the PhD journey conference organised by the University of Aberdeen and this helped in understanding different career paths and the benefits of a PhD.
- Seek advice. My supervisors and others who have had to make similar decisions have been very helpful in giving advice and suggestions. Particularly, my PhD supervisor Dr Poobalan, has been extremely resourceful and helpful.
- Support system. My family (even though they are in Nigeria) has been an invaluable support system during the process of transitioning. I have also found support systems with my friends, fellow PhD students and one of the local churches in Aberdeen.
- Don't be afraid to make mistakes. I wasted a lot of time because I wanted to be sure I was doing the right thing.
- **“Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new.” - Albert Einstein.**
- Be the best scientist you can be.

Are we there yet?

- Do I have all the answers? No. Do I know exactly where I am going? No. Am I THERE yet? No.
- But I do trust that it will all make sense in the end.



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