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Tshiamo Legoale, 2017 FameLab international champion

New Voices of Science

Tshiamo Legoale is a vibrant and charismatic young woman who has captured the world's attention with her story of proudly South African science. A geologist at Mintek, Tshiamo is the reigning international FameLab champion and was awarded the title in June 2017. With her talk at the Cheltenham Science Festival in the United Kingdom, on South Africa's research into 'phytomining' – using plants to extract valuable metals from low-grade ores or improve the quality of polluted soils - she paved her way to international acclaim.

FameLab is an annual international science communication competition that runs in over 30 countries worldwide. Within a three-minute talk, young scientists must present a concept from their field of study to a public audience in an entertaining and enlightening way. Through this, FameLab develops public speaking skills in young scientists and encourages engagement with people outside their familiar scientific peers.

Tshiamo's winning talk on phytomining was informative and inspiring. She described how plants can absorb specific metals from the environment into their tissues and how this process can be used to literally harvest gold from wheat.

"FameLab is fun! It is educating, informative and challenging. It challenges you as a person, as a scientist, and as a communicator. And best, it turns you into a communicator if you aren't one", said Tshiamo.

"I used to think communicating my science was difficult. Through FameLab, I have learned that nothing explains science quite as simply and accurately as everyday examples, such as doing laundry, catching the train to work or even food preferences. We are literally surrounded by science and scientific concepts, and all it takes to have effective communication is to put those everyday concepts into perspective," she added.

FameLab searches for the science communication stars of tomorrow, who can show off their area of expertise in a fascinating and engaging way, inspiring and exciting the public about science and innovation, and act as role model to inspire new generations of scientists.

Each year, heats run across the country at partnering science councils and higher education institutions. Workshops are offered prior to each heat to support skills development. From each heat, a panel of judges of scientists and communication experts select participants to attend an exclusive science communication masterclass run by an international trainer from the UK and present at the semi-finals. Ten finalists then present at the national finals, from which one person is chosen as the SA FameLab Champion to represent South Africa at the international competition at the Cheltenham Science Festival in the UK.

With her newly developed passion for talking, and her ever-present drive to benefit her community, Tshiamo is currently working with disadvantaged communities and using the ore occurrences in their vicinity to create jobs through mineral beneficiation, as she continues her research in the small-scale mining and beneficiation division of Mintek.

FameLab is an initiative of Cheltenham Festivals in the United Kingdom. In South Africa, it is made possible by a partnership between the British Council, the South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement, a business unit of the National Research Foundation, and Jive Media Africa.

For more information about FameLab and to meet other FameLab alumni, visit www.britishcouncil.org.za/famelab and www.saasta.ac.za/competitions/famelab

To keep up-to-date with FameLab events on social media, follow #famelabsa