

Mr. Linda Maoyi, Introduction Interview

SAPRIN, 5 July 2021

To welcome Mr. Linda Maoyi into the position of SAPRIN Senior Data Specialist, Ms. Nosiselo Mchiza (Senior Officer) conducted an “Introduction” interview. As follows:

Nosiselo (N): Hi Linda, as you take up the position of senior data specialist and head of the SAPRIN data section we would like to hear more how you are feeling about the work and get to know you better.

Here are some questions that we are curious about:

If you could have a career in anything, what would it be? Would you always choose data science?

Linda (L): For the past three years I have been farming and I would love to end up again as a full-time farmer. I do enjoy data science and programming, but one day I am sure I will be farming again.

N: What attracted you to working at SAPRIN?

L: I was looking to change out of my previous work environment which was in consultancy and technical training where I did too many things at once, from fraud detection to custom intelligence to training on programming, all within a few days. I needed a more focused environment for data science. When I learned about SAPRIN I was excited about the type of work I would be doing especially working with researchers and academics. I feel I am academic myself and enjoy being with like-minded people. I also love writing research articles. And joining the Medical Research Council has really lived up to my expectation in this regard.

N: I know it is still early days here at SAPRIN but what is something you find challenging about your work?

L: At the moment there are so many things on my plate, and I will need to learn to prioritise. There are several technologies that I need to rapidly become familiar with, for example learning a new programming language (Julia) at the same time as learning how HDSS data are organised i.e., how the different pieces link together, and how SAPRIN processes the longitudinal data. But I am enjoying it and also enjoy meeting interesting peers and collaborators in Kenya and Malawi.

N: Do you have mentors in your professional life?

L: Yes, I have two. Firstly, there is my PhD supervisor (BJ) with whom I have meaningful discussions on a weekly basis. When this job opportunity came up, I consulted him about whether it is where I need to be, and he gave it the thumbs-up. The other mentor is my previous manager from SAS (AN), someone I really respect for his experience in the industry, and I ask him for advice from on an almost daily basis.

N: Will you be applying any ‘Big Data’ techniques?

L: Big Data techniques will come much later. Our first task is data visualization so that a normal person can understand what is contained in the SAPRIN data. And the next task will be looking at storing the data efficiently and safely. Only then will we be better placed to use Big Data techniques.

N: What is your most-used productivity hack?

L: Microsoft Tasks works very well and has been good to me. I have it adapted to stay as up-to-date and complete as possible. For example, I use Cortana to link to the MS Tasks and not let things slip through.

N: Is it true that you have a PhD underway? – what is that all about?

L: The good news right now is that my latest PhD paper has been accepted and is available as a pre-print on Friday. I am aiming to submit the PhD thesis to my supervisor in a week or two. The topic is a particular high-pressure system called the Botswana High on the Southern African sub-continent, and whether it plays a role in producing droughts, which it does. The impacts can include water shortages, crop failures, animals dying and famine, so it is important to understand the regulators of drought in Southern Africa.

N: Have you worked in interesting places you could tell us about?

L: One interesting position was as a weatherman on ETV. The newsroom environment was crazy and I saw a lot of famous people from sport and politics walking through. I often took selfies with celebrities passing through, on my Nokia N-70 with a front-facing camera, before selfies were known as such.

N: Are you a morning person or a night owl?

L: A bit of both, actually, it depends on when and where, for example. Durban's early sunrise makes it a pleasure to start the day early especially on the weekends, with lots of things to attend to. I was used to a later start and often don't sleep well during the week, but I have adjusted to starting work at 8 in the morning.

N: What's the best compliment you've ever received?

L: I have been called a charmer many times. My best compliment was when my students at SAS started calling me Goat, which was odd because they seemed to be giving me a compliment. Later, I learned that it means "Greatest-of-all-time", which is a serious compliment and implies that they learned well from me as a teacher. They valued the strict learning environment that I created, and this was the meaning of the Goat nickname. And the nickname really stuck in that environment.

N: Do you have any hidden talents or hobbies?

L: I am passionate about music and singing. I sing baritone in a church choir back at home called "Tsoere Lilla Mohlakeng" <(3) [Macecilia Tsoere Lilla Mohlakeng - Gloria - YouTube](#)>, and back in student days I was a member of UCT's Choir for Africa. When I was in high school I played the flute.

N: What's your idea of a perfect day?

L: If I accomplished all the goals that I set for myself that day.

N: Thanks for a wonderful interview and we wish you all the very best for you work at SAPRIN.