



Article from  
**International News**  
September 2017  
Issue 72

# IACA Strengthens and Unifies the African Actuarial Practice

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I have a particular interest in the role of actuaries in African development and in new industries. Being a committee member of the International Association of Consulting Actuaries (IACA) has provided me with a powerful platform to manifest this interest into influence across Africa. I'll take you on a brief journey of how I became involved with the International Association of Actuaries (IAA) and what I have been up to within IACA in the past year.

My first contact with IACA was at the 2014 International Congress of Actuaries (ICA) in Washington, D.C., when the association offered me a bursary for my participation in the event. I went on to win a Best Paper Prize for a research paper on the role of actuaries in social security in Africa. I responded to IACA's call for volunteers and immediately got involved in its publications team by writing articles for the quarterly newsletter. At the time, I was also the secretary of the Actuarial Society of South Africa (ASSA) Social Security Member Forum.

Following my participation with IACA publications over a two-year period and subsequently qualifying as a fellow, I was pleasantly surprised to be nominated as a committee member. I was elected to the committee at the 2016 Colloquium in St. John's Newfoundland where I also took the opportunity to present research I had been conducting with a former colleague. Since then, I have been focused on raising the profile of IACA among my African colleagues and encouraging closer collaborations among consulting actuaries and other professionals. Additionally, I have had the opportunity to assist my IACA colleagues in developing the consulting track for the 2018 ICA, which has provided me with even more insight into the organizational mechanisms that keep this large organization running. More recently, I have also been involved with the ASSA and IAA banking committees as I work within a large banking institution. I have taken this opportunity to actively leverage off the two different areas by learning from and improving the initiatives across both practice areas.

The moral of the story: One of the easiest and cost-effective ways to learn and influence what you are interested in is to volunteer. It often looks like you are working for "free," but the value you derive from volunteering (if you do so diligently and in an area of strong interest to you) far exceeds the resources you spend. When you are young and don't have a lengthy track record of achievement within the profession, or you don't have many opportunities to display your skills in your "day job," you can make use of volunteering opportunities to learn and develop faster than your peers. Additionally, volunteering can open your eyes to new opportunities, perspectives, people and places to which you would otherwise never have access to.

Given the fact that IACA serves the interests of consulting actuaries within a diverse range of practice areas, it has also exposed me to the different issues that are of interest for actuaries in areas outside of my specialties. It has been eye-opening to see the direct link between instrumental matters discussed within IACA and practice in corporate and consulting settings. Additionally, as the profession ventures into wider fields, such as banking, climate change and the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) industries, the role of consulting actuaries to act as pioneers and identify how actuaries can best add new value to these industries is critical to the development and advancement of the profession.

Over the past year, IACA activities have focused on raising the profile of the section across the globe. My focus to date has been the South African Development Community (SADC) region, starting with South Africa, Kenya and Zimbabwe. Good progress has been made in these countries. I have reached out to the actuaries and senior actuarial students in these countries by inviting them to join and participate in the Africa Sub-Committee of IACA, as well as asking for their contact and professional details. Although the responses have not been resounding, several members from the different countries have expressed their interest in both joining and taking an active role in IACA. A few members have extended invitations to meet with others from across the region in the near future and to share knowledge on working in different parts of the region. This is a testament to the fact that wherever you look, there are always willing helping hands. Oftentimes, people just need to know that opportunities are available.

Our aim is to build a network of consulting actuaries within the region who can assist one another on the various initiatives taking place in these countries, from peer reviews, government work that requires teams from several firms and learning about one another's landscapes. The latter may be instrumental in creating further opportunities and expanding the role of actuaries to add value to several industries.

Speaking at various forums (the conferences, IAA meetings and webinars) has opened doors for me to foster relationships with other actuaries (and a few other professions such as lawyers, bankers and physicians) across the region. It has also allowed me to link up individuals who can assist one another.

The key next steps will be to formalize the IACA database on which we have been working and make it accessible to registered members. The countries that I will be approaching next are Malawi, Botswana, Zambia and Namibia. More events will bring together consulting actuaries in the region. IACA and the Actuarial Society of Zambia (ASZ) have committed to hosting an increased number of webinars in the near future. This will give actuaries working in the region a more regular forum to discuss issues that are relevant to their day-to-day work as well as ideas for how best to advance actuarial involvement in these jurisdictions. In instances that involve an established practice area, we will be collaborating with actuaries in that specialty to get key technical insights, in addition to the consulting angle.

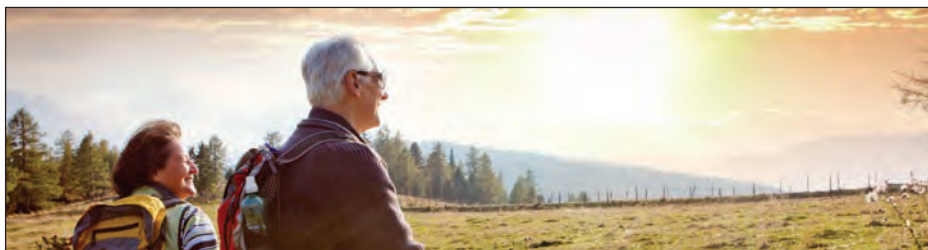
My involvement with IACA has provided me with informal leadership training and taught me how to better manage projects, take stronger accountability, develop my confidence, work in diverse teams, understand how the profession is run at a global

level and contribute to its future development. The individuals I have met and with whom I have fostered relationships have motivated me to carefully consider and strategize my contribution, not just to the profession, but also to the development of young people. I am always impressed by the caliber of the newly qualified actuaries and young actuarial students I meet across the globe. Again, all some people need is an opportunity and a nudge to draw out their full potential. It is an incredible opportunity to meet fellow professionals from across the globe (and travel the world while doing so!). It is an honor to be part of the IAA and be able to contribute to the future of the actuarial profession.

If you are interested in knowing more about IACA and would like to get involved in one of our subcommittees, please contact me at [kudzai.chigiji@africansthinking.com](mailto:kudzai.chigiji@africansthinking.com). ■



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