

## 2025 VOSH/International Humanitarian of the Year Award

### Levi Uchechukwu Osuagwu, OD, MSc, PhD, FAAO

Dr Osuagwu graduated from Abia University in Nigeria. Since then, through hard work and vision, he has become a brilliant mentor, advocate, educator, and researcher, showing exemplary leadership in optometry and public health across Africa and several other continents. His continuous drive to support the next generation of optometrists in improving their own clinical skills and the lives of others is an example to all.

Through his leadership roles in mobilising African SVOSH chapters and as the Founder of the African Federation of Optometry Students (AFOS), he has successfully motivated young optometrists and optometry students across Africa to engage in service, advocacy, and community-based eye health initiatives. With the African SVOSH chapters, he emphasized building capacity and inspiring students to see beyond volunteering as short-term outreach, but as part of a larger mission to strengthen primary eye care systems in underserved communities. He was instrumental in the establishment of the SVOSH chapters in Mozambique and at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa.



Founding AFOS was a response to the need for a unified student voice in Africa. Under his leadership, AFOS created a platform for collaboration, professional development, and advocacy that connects optometry students across countries. This not only cultivates future leaders but also ensures that humanitarian service is embedded in the identity of the next generation of optometrists.

By positioning students as partners in humanitarian service and research, he demonstrated

leadership that extends beyond immediate interventions, fostering sustainability, cross-border collaboration, and a culture of service that continues to shape optometry in Africa today.

He has initiated several collaborative projects with optometry schools across Africa, including those in Kenya (MMUST) and South Africa (UKZN), and has been invited to serve as an external examiner at the same schools. He has supervised many postgraduate students at Western Sydney University, where he serves as a stream for Rural Health and Indigenous MD Projects, supporting critical health initiatives.

By research impact, Dr Osuagwu ranks second among the top optometry academics in African universities. He has secured multiple research grants and published over 100 articles, 86% of which appear in high-impact journals like Lancet Global Health and BMJ Open. Recent awards and nominations include the 2025 AAO Essilor Award for Outstanding International Contributions to Optometry, Western Rural Health Researcher of the Year (2024) and the AAO International Mentor Award (2024), among several others.

He also serves as Guest Editor for journals like Nutrition and IJERPH and lead initiatives such as the African Translational Research Group (ATReG) and Centre for Eye Care and Public Health Intervention Initiative (CEPHII). These efforts have resulted in 18 articles and "Africa's Knowledge Bridge" a book that promotes equitable knowledge access aligned with Sustainable Development Goals.



In professional organizations, he was appointed the Director of Research and Advocacy for the African Council of Optometry (2024) and President of the American Academy of Optometry - African Chapter (2023). Committed to community engagement, he initiated local health initiatives in Bathurst, including forming the 1<sup>st</sup> Community Reference Group and Indigenous Health Forum. Collaborations with the Diabetes Foundation Aotearoa in New Zealand have led to impactful research outputs since 2022.

Dr Osuagwu's work demonstrates the various qualities that a humanitarian has. A role model for young generations, a leader for fellow optometrists encouraging excellence and collaborative action, a practitioner who keeps the underserved communities a priority, and an academic who builds the evidence to influence change. His career reflects a strong commitment to bridging health disparities, empowering communities, and advancing translational research across continents

The VOSH/International Humanitarian of the Year Award recognizes a volunteer who has made a significant impact on visual welfare within the past year by contributing to leadership, education, innovation, public health initiatives, sustainable eye care development, or advancing the understanding and treatment of refractive error and visual impairment.

Dr. Osuagwu is an excellent role model who is changing African optometry.

Congratulations on a well-deserved award.

