

NewAfrican

VOICE OF AFRICAN WOMEN IS A COLLABORATION BETWEEN
NEW AFRICAN MAGAZINE AND COLLATERAL BENEFITS.

VOICES

OF

AFRICAN

WOMEN

In collaboration with:  collateral benefits

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Josina Z. Machel
Kelebozile
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VOICES OF AFRICAN WOMEN DURING THE TIME OF COVID

New African Magazine is delighted and honoured to join hands with Collateral Benefits in launching this campaign, *Voices of African Women* as we all navigate the grim tides of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The collaboration shares the personal views, reflections and experiences of African women during this extraordinary period when what we took for granted as 'normal life' has been suspended and we have been forced to fall back on our inner resources.

As always, the burden of maintaining stability and a sense of purpose both inside and outside the home during a period of crisis

falls disproportionately on women. As has been said, it is the women who nurture and keep the flame of hope burning when the world seems to collapse around us.

Yet, as many of these reflections reveal, women are still often abused, beaten, ignored and treated as second class people whose rights, needs and dreams and aspirations can be trampled upon with impunity.

But, again as these reflections from a very diverse range of women show, African women today refuse to 'suffer in silence'. They have found their voices and what they have to say is both riveting and profound.

Their unique narratives

cover the ground from shifting social norms, thorny gender issues, intriguing perspectives on science, education, entrepreneurship and painful but necessary dissection of mental health issues. They write with wit, candour and insight – allowing us to draw much needed inspiration from their views in these difficult times.

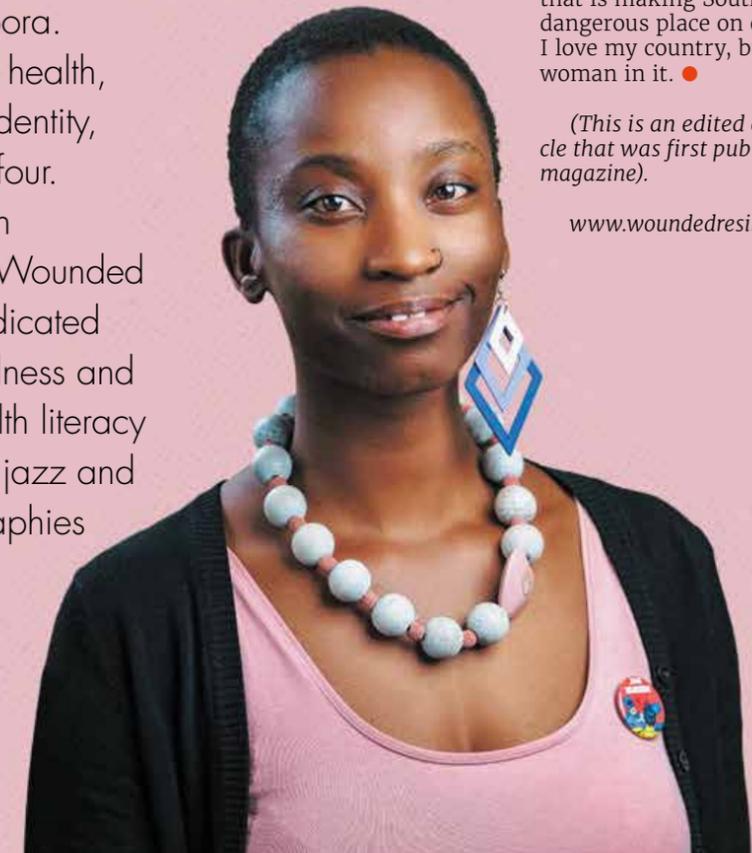
The pieces we are publishing are a sample of vox pox taken from the upcoming Collateral Benefits perspective papers: *Voices of African Woman* and *Voices of African Leaders* (launching in January 2021).

Anver Versi, Editor,
New African magazine

THE MOST DANGEROUS PLACE IN THE WORLD TO BE A WOMAN

Kelebogile Matsuwa

South Africa is a creative non-fiction writer, columnist and digital content strategist. She enjoys writing about socio-political issues concerning Africans on the continent and in the Diaspora. She is interested in mental health, personhood, culture and identity, and the intersection of all four. She is also a mental health advocate and founder of Wounded Resilience), a platform dedicated to destigmatising mental illness and contributing to mental health literacy in Africa. Kelebogile loves jazz and enjoys reading autobiographies and academic papers.



Right now, at this very hour, somewhere in South Africa a woman is in the final moments of her life. Her humanity and breath are being stripped away by a lover, a relative, a neighbour, a stranger, a friend; men – they do it so comfortably, with distressing nonchalance, like a pickpocket at a bustling market in central Johannesburg.

Described as our nation's 'second pandemic', gender-based violence (GBV) claims the life of a South African woman every three hours. To be a woman in South Africa is to always be in protest and to always be at war.

Factors that I believe contribute to high rates of sexual abuse are the objectification and sexualisation of women, and the fact that women have been denied their personhood. If you see someone as an object to be consumed, then you will feel at liberty to do whatever you please with them.

Men have been conditioned and socialised to believe that they cannot win the fight against their temptations and impulses. "A man's gotta have sex. A man cannot survive without sex".

Until we fix what is broken in men and we tell them to change their ways, GBV will continue to be the scourge that is making South Africa the most dangerous place on earth for a woman.. I love my country, but I hate being a woman in it. ●

(This is an edited excerpt from an article that was first published in *New African* magazine).

www.woundedresilience.co.za

TIME TO 'BOUNCE FORWARD'

Yabome Gilpin-Jackson

Sierra Leone/Canada is a dreamer, doer and storyteller, committed to imaging and leading the futures we want through award-winning human and organisation development scholarship and practice. She is the co-founder of We Will Lead Africa, writing and curating African identity, leadership and belonging stories..



Resilience is the ability to 'bounce back'. Whenever a relatively positive narrative is spun about the continent of Africa and her peoples, it is often one about resilience. After all, if African countries and African people continue to endure suffering and pain and yet continue to exist, then surely, it can be concluded that if nothing else, we are resilient.

I see this narrative is as trite and dehumanizing; the patronising and patriarchal tone places 'Africa - that dark continent', as a passive recipient of a doomed destiny. In this narrative, suffering is inevitable and unstoppable for or by African peoples, especially African women, who are expected to carry the brunt of the load, literally and figuratively, of daily burdens and ongoing violence of all kinds.

Whilst there is truth and evidence for the common aphorism 'what doesn't kill us, makes us stronger', and that transformation is a possible outcome of trauma, my own research on post-traumatic growth has also raised the perspective that a continuous narrative on 'resilience' is inhumane.

It is inhumane to continue to be bystanders to suffering for the sake of observing the collateral benefit of resilience, because an environment that perpetuates suffering will not only erode resilience, but amplify mental-health and traumatic injuries, in turn closing off possibilities for innovation and transformation.

The crises of COVID-19 and social inequality has revealed the environmental and social structures that breed suffering for Black peoples globally. But it has also opened up opportunities for African women who have been positioning to take space in all arenas: they are building on what our ancestors did quietly while fulfilling traditional gender-assigned roles, to boldly lead Africa's progress - as we saw in documenting their stories for We Will Lead Africa, Volume II: Women.

As we respond to COVID-19 and shape Africa's future, it's time to not only look for the resilient solutions ('bounce back'), but to take actions that allow us to 'bounce forward'. Resilient no more! We are here to take and make space for Africa's continued transformation, especially for African girls and women on the continent and in the diaspora. ●

#belonging
#mentalhealth

THE HEALING POWER OF BELONGING

Sarah J Owusu

Ghana/Denmark, based in South Africa is co-founder of two story-telling platforms: Collateral Benefits and We Will Lead Africa, that focus on documenting and sharing African perspectives and stories of everyday African leadership in order to shift global narratives. She is an award-winning organisation development practitioner and coach, and applies her expertise to the innovation space through the boutique consultancy, InkDot (www.theinkdot.com).



that the 'quality and quantity of individuals' social relationships has been linked not only to mental-health but also to both morbidity and mortality'.

A sense of belonging has a direct impact on overall life satisfaction and on our mental-health. So what is a sense of belonging? According to a Science Direct study, it is a person's experience of involvement in a system or environment - a feeling that one is an integral part of it. Just as we might think of financial resources as a cushion that

allows us to absorb financial shocks, a sense of belonging, membership to social groups and access to social support are a critical psychological resource, necessary for well-being.

Strengthening our sense of belonging is not just an individual endeavour; it requires relationships, community and social cohesion.

Unsurprisingly, the experience of belonging (or not belonging) runs along the existing rifts in social fabric - for example, unemployment and isolation has a significant negative impact on belonging, two areas where COVID-19 has hit us especially hard.

This understanding of what impacts our wellbeing shows us that strengthening our sense of belonging is not just an individual endeavour; it requires relationships, community and social cohesion. Our mental and physical health - indeed, our survival - is not just in our own hands, but in the collective and shared sense that we exist in a world that will catch us if we fall.

The shared experience of a global pandemic is an opportunity for us to reflect deeply on the interconnectedness of our human experience and our dependence on one another. And within African cultures, the centrality of community may give us a significant advantage, if prioritised. ●

#mentalhealthawareness
#investinmentalhealth
#suicideprevention

African countries may be faring better in terms of infection rates and number of deaths associated with COVID-19, but as the WHO Regional Director for Africa, Matshidiso Moeti states: "this new virus can stir up stress levels and trigger mental-health conditions or exacerbate existing ones". Whilst many African countries have considered mental-health in their COVID-19 response plans, most are only partially funded, or not funded at all.

Getting ahead of this pandemic means acknowledging that health goes beyond the physical. It's intuitive to assume that health is determined by lifestyle choices like diet, smoking and drinking. Alongside this, we need to include belonging as a fundamental human need.

A 2010 meta-analytic review confirms

OVERCOMING THE STIGMA OF MENTAL ILLNESS

Susana Edjang

Equatorial Guinea/

Spain has over 15 years of experience in international development. She is co-founding member of Afroinnova, an African diaspora innovation platform, is a member of the Council of the UK's Royal African Society, and co-founder of Collateral Benefits.



Greater awareness and investment in mental-health is long overdue and we know that the mental-health impacts will outlast the pandemic.

COVID-19 has disrupted health services across African countries, especially mental-health services. African mental-health practitioners report increased demand for mental-health services and psychosocial counselling.

This has come both from people with pre-existing mental-health conditions and those impacted by spikes in stressors associated with COVID-19 such as isolation, depression, anxiety about the risks associated with loss of income and loved ones, and the misuse of alcohol and drugs.

This situation has prompted many promising responses that help overcome the stigma and discrimination associated with mental-health conditions for people who live with them and

people working in this field.

A steady, albeit insufficient, visibility of mental-health issues has been sustained throughout the pandemic:

- The Africa CDC issued a guidance for mental-health and psychosocial support;
- According to the WHO, at least 27 African countries have integrated mental-health in their national responses, with the brave support of community or village health workers;
- Civil society and the private sector have expanded existing innovations or created new ones to ensure increased access to mental-health services and information through telemedicine, social media campaigns and other technological solutions.

Examples include iDocta Africa in Cameroon, Wazi in Kenya, the MEGA project in the Southern Africa Development Community, and Shezlong in Egypt.

Although these opportunities are limited to people with digital literacy and access to the internet and smartphones, they are a great addition to government efforts to make mental-health services fully accessible to those hardest to reach, especially in the rural areas. Next we must use these innovations to counteract the inequalities that maintain the 'treatment gap' – the proportion of people living with mental illness who don't get treatment – at over 70% across Africa, including those in refugee camps, and lead to the more than 35,000 Africans committing suicide each year.

Greater awareness and investment in mental-health is long overdue and we know from previous experiences with the Ebola epidemic or HIV/AIDS crises, that the mental-health impacts will outlast the pandemic.

It is critical for the prevention and the care of those at risk of and living with mental-health conditions, including frontline health workers. Mental-health and psychological support must be better integrated and prioritized into COVID-19 national responses and beyond. ●

#mentalhealthawareness
#investinmentalhealth
#suicideprevention



LOVING EVERY INCH OF YOURSELF

Táyra Augusto

Mozambique/South Africa is a singer, plus-size model and a chemical Engineer.

Growing up I always felt that I didn't belong. I was chubby, tallish and was raised by a mother who was a beauty icon in Mozambican society.

I didn't feel represented through commercials on TV that brain-washed me into believing that the core of beauty is 'being skinny' and that's the only way people will accept you. If you succeed at being skinny, then boys would like you and girls would envy you.

It wasn't long before eating disorders started knocking on my door, reminding me every day that if I ate that extra snack, I would have to starve myself the next day to compensate.

I always wished I wouldn't let my overthinking, anxiety and depression get the best of me, but it did. It still does, but with time I have learnt how to deal with these daily challenges and have mechanisms to avoid reverting back to my old ways.

Because of these experiences, body positivity and representation mean everything to me. Part of overcoming my personal challenges was carving out space in the very industry that didn't seem to include me.

As a plus-size model, I represent girls like me – that are not the norm of being tall, having a flat stomach and a gap between the thighs.

Small changes are happening – from stores displaying plus size mannequins to greater representation in movies – but we need complete inclusivity and that goes beyond size.

There are many 'marginal' bodies that are underrepresented in the mainstream media; when you add race and gender, there is a real necessity for Black, African woman models that looks like me.

In the context of COVID-19, an October 2020 study shows that the anxiety and stress of the situation could be causing body image issues.

We need to give voice to these issues, and challenge what is considered 'the norm', have healthy debates about our relationship with our bodies and rejecting the conditioning we've experienced.

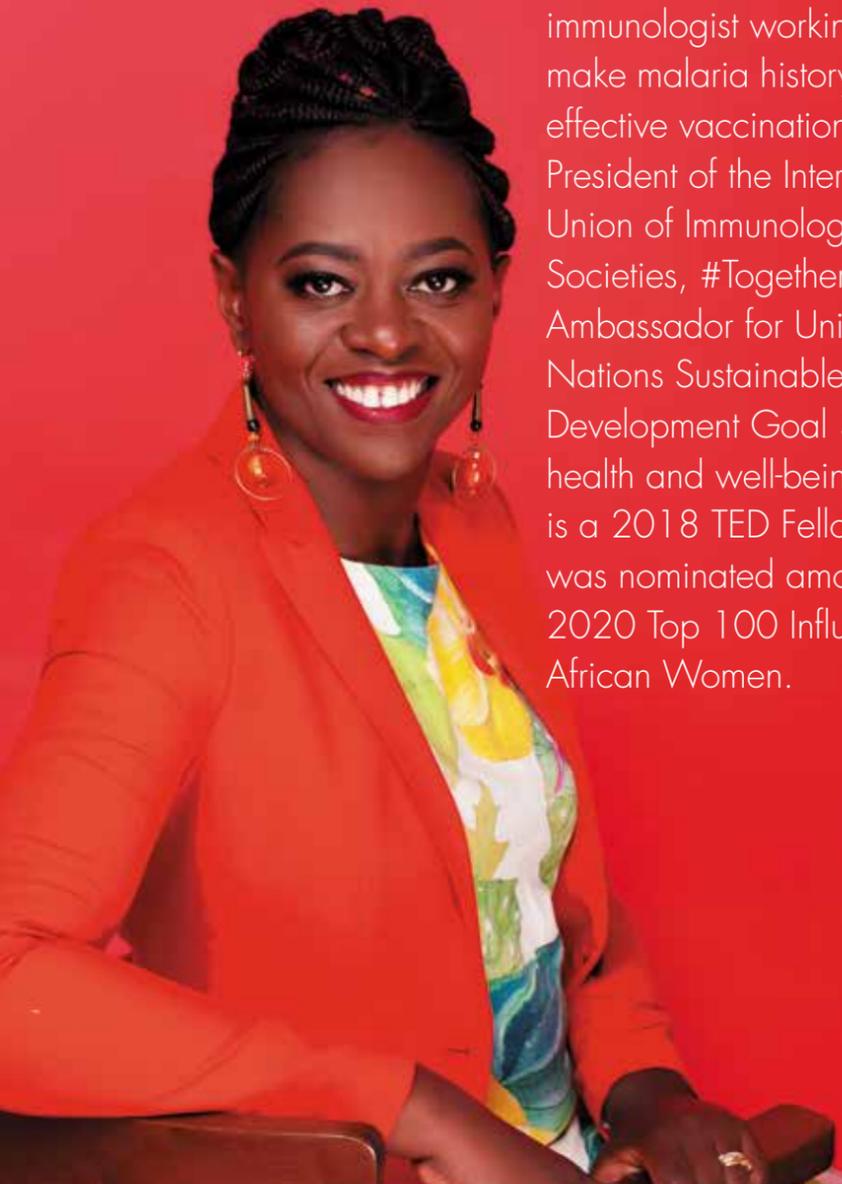
I educate folks to avoid commenting on the appearance of others unless asked, and speak up about loving every inch of yourself and embracing what you see in the mirror. ●

#belonging
#bodypositivity
#eatingdisorders
#mentalhealth

SCIENCE MADE IN AFRICA

Faith Osier

Kenya/Uganda is an immunologist working to make malaria history through effective vaccination. She is President of the International Union of Immunological Societies, #Togetherband Ambassador for United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 3: Good health and well-being. Faith is a 2018 TED Fellow and was nominated among the 2020 Top 100 Influential African Women.



We are all born with a desire to live, to prosper, to go further than the previous generation. My parents ensured that I did not face the indignities they have endured. They gave me the best education, protected me from disease and in so doing, empowered me to realise my highest dreams.

I am forever grateful. But many across Africa do not enjoy this privilege. We see killer infections (malaria, HIV, tuberculosis) and debilitating diseases stifle opportunities of a healthy life.

On top of that, for 420m people living below the poverty line, breaking out of the cycle is a Herculean task, in particular when national institutions cannot sustain these efforts for a critical mass of our population.

I see science as a key to turn what many consider to be our greatest weakness, into our greatest strength.

We have waited for others to define for us in contemporary terms what our illnesses were, and what we ought to do about them. Images of disease-ridden Africans make good features in the international media.

But there is another story emerging that deserves visibility too. Scientific endeavours are blooming all over Africa and centres of scientific excellence are turning their attention to capacity building.

See the success of the Mali International Center for Excellence in Research in detecting, treating and managing Ebola patients that enabled the country to be declared Ebola free in 2015.

In addition, the work of research centres such as the Kenya Medical Research Institute and the National Medical Research Institute of Tanzania, are increasing Africa's output of scientific research and training future generations of African scientists.

I am the first African and second woman President of the International Union of Immunological Societies. I work to train 1,000 African PhD students in immunology over the next 10 years through the Federation of African Immunological Societies Legacy Project, and to increase Africa's capacity and representation in global health.

I believe we can be the solutions our continent is yearning for and for that we need to believe in science made in Africa, and the health, wealth and prosperity this brings to the continent. ●

#sciencemadeinAfrica
#healthiswealth
#scienceiswealth

THE INSPIRING STORY OF BINA

Eliana Silva

Angola/Mozambique is a communications and public relations specialist. She is account director at CREATE, and this year she published her first book.

Creating the character, Bina, was an opportunity to represent a group of people often stigmatised.



Living in a moment of daily challenges basis, one thing we can take on is using the opportunity to rewrite our stories. We already know about the many challenges across African countries, but there is so much more to tell and there is power in telling our own story.

As we face a pandemic that doesn't allow for real connection, we need stories to show us the diverse faces and experiences of African women. We must show their bravery and lift up the strength of women.

As everything goes digital, we must use these spaces to change the stories that are represented. I want to see a multitude of women standing out and showing their competence, expertise and ability to drive development of their communities and countries.

I have spent this time creating a story that I am proud of. Bina, a Descobridora do Índico (Plural Editores África) – or in English, Bina, the Discoverer of the Indian Ocean – is a children's book that tells the story of Bina, a young girl with albinism who travels the world on her bicycle.

It is a story of empathy, courage, respect and self-love – values that have become only more important in the current pandemic. Across sub-Saharan Africa, albinism affects one in 1,000 people and in Mozambique specifically, more than 30,000 people are living with albinism.

Creating the character, Bina, was an opportunity to represent a group of people often stigmatised in society.

With no physical book launch, the release was an online gathering in conversation with another African storyteller, Eliana Nzualo. This moment of connection was important to me, more so in this moment of potential disconnect.

It feels even more relevant to raise stories that connect with young African girls, and that represent and show acceptance of the diversity of who we are. This moment is challenging, but it remains critical that we find our voice and share the stories of brave African girls and women. ●

#stroytelling
#narratives
#representation
#belonging

BUSINESS MUST LOOK RACISM IN THE EYE

Dvorah Stein

South Africa is founder of The Hive, working as a People and Culture Strategist and certified coach. She is a faculty member, Developmentor® and Assessor at Integral+ Africa's Coaching Centre with a background in Industrial Psychology. She finds purpose in supporting individuals, teams and organisations to navigate change, tap into their hidden power, activate their culture, transform obstacles and ignite innate potential.



The fact is that in a business context, not addressing racism has an impact on corporate culture and in turn on the business's ability to perform and grow.

In the context of the global pandemic, we are all learning to get comfortable with the uncertainty and ambiguity of the current moment.

But there is another shift that needs to happen: let's talk about race relations within our businesses. We are petrified of having the real conversations, of the messiness that will emerge when we have spent so much time

sanitising the surface of the issue and ticking boxes for compliance. We are unskilled in this area, and don't know how to hold the tension or navigate the flood of human experience, vulnerability and emotion.

Just as we have had to face the pandemic, we need to begin this powerful, uncomfortable and above-all necessary journey, for the sake of our collective humanity. Racism too, is a global issue, and South African businesses are avoiding the tough topic – to their detriment.

The fact is that in a business context, not addressing racism has an impact on corporate culture, and in turn on the business's ability to perform and grow.

Why? Because we know that organisational culture affects the bottom line and research has revealed that companies with strong cultures see a four times increase in revenue growth.

Satisfied employees also outperform their peers by 20%, and this is attributed to 12% more productivity. We literally can't afford to avoid addressing race and racism within our institutions.

Organisations need to learn to listen, and to work on their individual and collective bias and systemic blind spots in order to begin to create strong cultures.

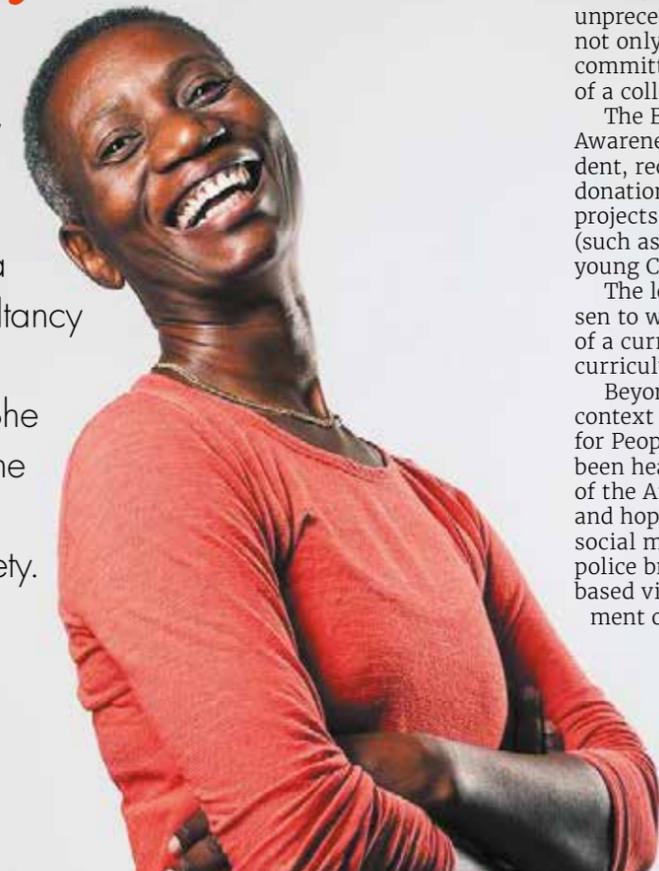
Businesses that achieve this can then begin to truly celebrate diversity and leverage the unique and rich perspectives and experiences that their people bring. In recent months we've had no choice but to live with the uncomfortable. We can use this practice to face the discomfort: look racism in the eye and address it head on. ●

#racism #coaching
#humandevlopment
#businessculture

TAKING UP THE CALL OF BLACK LIVES MATTER

Silvia Mangue

Canada/Equatorial Guinea, is the founder and CEO of Kulea Love, a social enterprise focused on non-medical care services; and Kulea Culture Society, a consultancy specialized on equity, inclusion and diversity. She is also the president of the British Columbia Black History Awareness Society.



According to a poll by TD Canada Trust, (a Canadian commercial bank) conducted in April and May this year, young Canadians and those who are Black, Indigenous or People of Colour have been the hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in their pockets.

Sixty-four percent of Black Canadians expect to face unemployment and a reduction of their income in the last quarter of 2020, compared with 53% of the general population.

This survey shows that the fight against systemic racism in Canada is far from over. More needs to be done, in particular, given the current call to put an end to the ongoing episodes of police brutality against Black Canadians.

But as the Black Canadian population is only about 3.5% of the total population, a smaller number compared with 14% for African-Americans in the US, these episodes keep being treated as a one-off events rather than a systemic problem (Statistics Canada 2019).

The Black Lives Matter movement in the US resulted in the mobilisation and solidarity of Canadian youth from across different cultural and ethno-racial backgrounds.

This support was unexpected and unprecedented, because young people not only risked their health but were committed, as individuals and as part of a collective, to action.

The British Columbia Black History Awareness Society, of which I am president, received an influx of financial donations, volunteers for events and projects, and in-kind offers of support (such as pro bono use of venues) from young Canadians.

The local government has also chosen to work with us in the development of a curriculum to enhance the local curriculum on Black history.

Beyond Canada, especially in the context of the UN International Decade for People of African Descent, it has been heartening to witness the support of the African Union to this movement, and hopefully it will do more to support social movements across Africa against police brutality, armed conflicts, gender based violence, and the mismanagement of natural resources. ●

#youth #socialjustice
#racism #diaspora

WE MUST END GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Josina Z. Machel

Mozambique/South

Africa is a well-known Women Human Rights Defender. Following a horrific domestic violence attack that left her blind in one eye, she founded the Kuhluka Movement, a non-profit initiative that empowers women survivors of gender-based violence, to which she dedicates her life.



I trace my left eye across the horizon of humanity, watching the trend unfold. For African women resisting violence, we are swiftly becoming dust that falls through the cracks of the systems meant to protect us. As the pillars of society, a collective call for an end to gender-based violence (GBV) is our only mandate.

Mountains are formed when pain of eruption transforms into purpose. We are existing in unprecedented times, leaning on the edge of the cliff called humanity; our faith fading in the justice and health systems which have failed not only myself, but every Mozambican woman and every African woman.

Perpetrators of violence and all those complicit operate with impunity in every home and on every street corner without eyes and ears in our favour.

If we successfully carry out the campaign to achieve Justice 4 All Women, we will shift the narrative by confronting our judicial systems which so often side with the aggressors.

We have the power in numbers with our brothers and sisters across the continent and we will not rest until every judicial system is transformed to take a victim and survivor centered approach.

The GBV pandemic in Africa is man-made and rampant, tainting every thread in the fabric of our societies. It is only fitting that my cry out echoes as Kuhluka, calling on a rebirth to ensure the safety and survival of every African woman. It is time to begin again and open up to an Africa where our daughters are born to bloom. ●

#genderbasedviolence
#justice

OUR FUTURES DEPEND ON EDUCATION

Maria del Mar Bonkanka Tapares

Equatorial Guinea/Spain

is an economist and Alternate Executive Director at the African Development Bank. Born in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, raised in Spain. Seven years ago she returned to Equatorial Guinea where she has worked in various roles, including as a Secretary of State, at the Ministry of Finance, Economy and Planning.



I have been lucky to be born into a family where values, education, the importance of equal opportunities and the effort necessary to achieve it, have always been accentuated. It was crystal clear to my parents that the best inheritance they could leave us with was a good education.

I was especially fortunate to have this as I was growing up and I feel it even more special now, in a world with such increased inequalities.

Despite the progress across Africa over the last two decades towards improving universal access across genders to primary education, we can do better on improving completion rates and the quality of education. COVID-19 has exacerbated the challenges to obtain a complete education for many children and youth, especially girls. Schools had to close and that means, in Africa, according to the World Bank, over 250m children were out of school.

Education and continuity of learning—whether you are a farmer, a teacher, a programmer or a cook—are essential factors for the improvement of productivity and competitiveness of an economy.

Education is also about the personal ability to adapt to the impact of changes in our economies, including those due to climate change.

Education and continuity of learning are essential factors for the improvement of productivity and competitiveness.

However, the improvements needed in education have not always received the same visibility and investments as other sectors. In some cases, African governments have opted to reduce the education budget just when it has become crucial to understand what is happening around us and developing the social and emotional capacities as the future citizens of the continent.

If we choose not to invest in education, we pose a great threat to achieving national development plans and the 'Africa We Want'. Any national, regional, or continental plan depends on education.

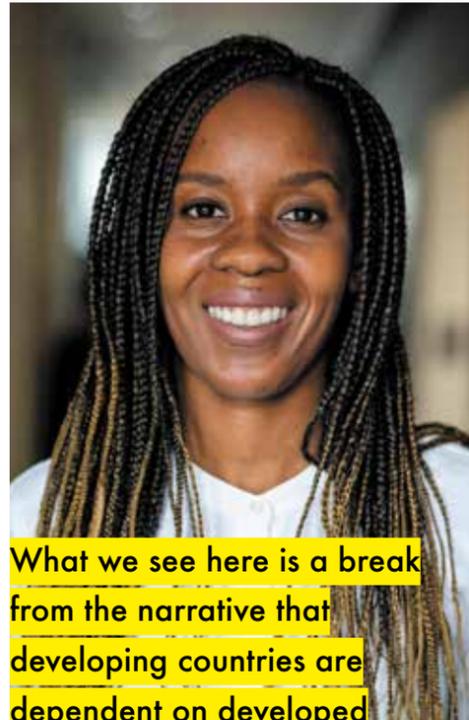
Thus we must think about and invest in the education that we need, so that we can become who we need to be and are better able to harness our destinies to achieve what we must achieve. ●

#education
#legacy
#equalizer

FIGHTING COVID HAS SHOWN POWER OF AFRICAN INGENUITY

Yara Manuela Cumbi

Mozambique is a Health Systems Analyst using multidisciplinary and collaborative approaches to achieve better health outcomes at local levels. She is committed to addressing gaps in the healthcare system by finding lasting public health solutions with beneficiaries in mind. She has worked across an array of public health projects including establishing a comprehensive approach to care for survivors of gender-based violence, evaluating Mozambique's national tuberculosis program, HIV/AIDS primary healthcare, health research, human resources for health, supply chains for medical commodities, and more.



What we see here is a break from the narrative that developing countries are dependent on developed countries for knowledge, solutions and resources.

When the first rumbles of the pandemic indicated the potential of its destructive power, many were left wondering what the effects would be globally.

As Wuhan city was the first to shut down and then Western countries like Italy fell into serious distress, the question on many experts' minds was: what catastrophe is awaiting Africa?

The reality was strikingly different from the predictions. Even accounting for the head start (many African countries had their first reported cases in March, one or two months later than those in Europe, North America and Asia), the continent has seen better outcomes and fewer cases. The worst hit African country is South Africa, which is currently at 16th place with over 750,000 cases, behind countries in North America, Europe and Latin America where the pandemic is raging (as of November 24th).

Africa's leaders have risen to the challenge and overcome geographical, economic and political barriers. There has been inter-continental co-ordination and collaboration that has been absent in past pandemics and through other crises and a continental task force was assembled.

The solutions have been novel, taking countries' unique contexts and challenges into account: a year-old genomics start-up in Nigeria launched a sizeable fund to address the inadequate testing; researchers in Uganda developed a coronavirus test. What we see here is a break from the narrative that developing countries are dependent on developed countries for knowledge, solutions and resources. When Africans create their own solutions, the responses are more flexible and more appropriate for country responses.

We must continue this trajectory by creating environments that foster and reward home-grown solutions. Scientific solutions to challenges in developing countries are being found by those from developing countries and can be used as an example the world over.

#healthcare
#panAfrican
#narratives
#innovation

SMES ARE THE BACKBONE OF THE ECONOMY

Matsi Modise

South Africa is Vice-Chairperson of SiMODiSA Start-Up and Founding CEO of Furaha Afrika Holdings, a pan-African company with subsidiaries across several sectors. She is a World Economic Forum Global Shaper and has won numerous awards for her disruptive work and achievements.



South Africa is the biggest incubator of ideas – people come to South Africa to access its infrastructure, cheap labour and hub location. It is the perfect place to access other African markets, but often with a business registered off-shore.

South Africa needs a plan for itself that leverages our strengths and fortifies our fragile economy. We need to get specific if we want to see South African solutions to global problems.

Currently we have an archaic framework (the Small Business Act of 1996), lack of action and implementation, restrictive Intellectual Property policies and embedded corruption.

With COVID-19, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are in distress and it shows us that we haven't been investing enough in ensuring a robust economy.

We must create space for the free flow of ideas and collaboration, not a politically-led structure that is entangled with bureaucracy and restrictive regulations.

An ecosystem approach must be future-proof, built bottom up and centered on the needs of SMEs; where stakeholders across sectors have a shared and vested interest, and understand how they can benefit and contribute.

As it stands, SMEs face barriers of access to market and an 'old regime' that doesn't want to share. We don't want hand-outs! We don't need charity, grants and donations facilitated by government. We are delivering value, so SMEs should be seen as investments that will bring return.

We need support in commercialising what we have to offer, policies that allow us to be competitive globally, procurement opportunities and training to equip SMEs to supply consistently.

We start with our strengths: one example is South African fintechs – many SMEs in this space have done exceptionally well, complementing our strong financial services sector and have potential to go international.

At SiMODiSA we support organisations with indigenous solutions and provide access to resources and networks to make it possible for them to participate in building our economy.

We are also coming together with other players to craft a StartUp Act for South Africa – a process already a success in Tunisia and Senegal, benefiting those countries with job creation, innovation and collaboration.

A StartUp Act would provide the vision, direction and structure needed to make the most of our talent, create jobs and overall, move towards clear outcomes in an intentional manner. ●

#entrepreneurship
#SMEs

Collateral Benefits is a platform that through a series of Perspective Papers aims to lift up the voices of African and Afro-descendant people from all walks of life, so that

African and Afro-descendant intellect, wisdom and experiences can contribute to and shape the global conversations on the critical issues of our time.

ABOUT COLLATERAL BENEFITS



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