

Digital Storytelling for Social Change

Project Dates: 13 June 2022 – 12 August 2022
Country: Zimbabwe
Sponsoring College: Smith College
Project Leader: Juliana Makonise' 25
Team Members: Nyasha Chiyanike'25 (University of Zimbabwe), Takudzwa Caitano'23 (Stanford University), Kuziva Mahwire'23 (Dartmouth College)

Project Summary

This project provides a platform for young people (15-24 years) to harness storytelling and digital media to address social ills and promote peace in Zimbabwe. Through an online speech and writing contest and a digital storytelling capacity-building workshop, youths will be equipped with knowledge and skills on how to effectively advocate for positive social change by integrating digital media into their speech and writing pursuits.

Objectives

- To encourage the use of storytelling as a tool for social change
- To create a platform for youth to share their ideas towards sustainable development
- To promote the use of digital media as a tool for advocacy

Background

Having taken two gap years to focus on community development work as a Zimbabwean youth advocate, I was directly exposed to the challenges young people face when seeking opportunities to engage in national development. Despite constituting approximately 62% of the Zimbabwean population, young people's voices have long been excluded from decision-making processes. Youth participation in political, social, and economic sectors has been limited due to the increased undermining and suppression of youth voices in national growth¹. There have been minimal spaces for youth to share their thoughts and ideas towards sustainable development and help drive socioeconomic growth and prosperity. Through working with Action Aid and UNESCO, I realized that without amplifying young people's voices and promoting intergenerational civic engagement, it is difficult for community leaders and policymakers to determine how youths envision the future and how they can collaborate in solving societal challenges. With the increased call for meaningful youth engagement, it is critical to engage youth in shaping solutions to social ills, giving them platforms to share their perspectives creatively². Digital media has availed more opportunities to disseminate information quickly and easily to a wide-range of stakeholders. Young people should, therefore, be capacitated on how to leverage digital media to openly share their stories of struggle, innovation, and aspiration. Just like Mary McLeod Bethune said, 'We have a powerful potential in our youth, and we must have the courage to change old ideas and practices so that we may direct their power toward good ends.' It is vital to tap into the power of youth to guarantee a peaceful and prosperous future. A progressive step towards this is to create spaces for young people to share their innovative ideas towards solving social problems which is exactly what we ought to achieve through this project.

Project Execution

As the editors of Think Afrika³, an online platform that publishes articles which highlight Africa's standing in various economic, political, and social frameworks, we will coordinate the speech and writing contest and digital storytelling capacity building workshop. Our commitment towards

¹ Low youth participation - a ticking time bomb for Zimbabwe's future - <https://futureafricaforum.org/2019/01/18/low-youth-participation-a-ticking-time-bomb-for-zimbabwes-future/>

² UNESCO Operational Strategy for Youth (2014-2021) <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000227150>

³ Think Afrika <https://www.thinkafrika.org/>



pioneering grassroots storytelling has propelled us to avail opportunities for Africans to shape and share their narratives towards development through digital media. The speech and writing contest will give youths between 15 and 24 years a chance to each submit a 4-5minute video or 600-800 word essay under any one of the following themes: youth unemployment, health inequity, gender-based violence, education inequality, and digital illiteracy. These are prevailing social issues that have adversely affected communal harmony therefore youth perspectives on these challenges will be helpful in molding restorative solutions. To ensure that this contest is inclusive, we will accept entries from youths from all the ten provinces of Zimbabwe. The submission of entries will start on 13 June 2022 and end on 15 July 2022. All entries will be submitted through the Think Afrika website⁴ which will help us monitor and assess submissions. Depending on the total number of submissions, we expect to host an online digital storytelling workshop via Zoom on 1 August 2022. In this 3-hour workshop, we will cover the following topics: Advocacy through Storytelling, Blogging for Impact, and Effective Digital Media Use. We each have past experience facilitating training workshops therefore we will delegate roles to ensure a successful delivery of the content. Due to the high cost of internet service in Zimbabwe, we will provide data reimbursements to all the participants of the workshop. In case other participants fail to join the workshop due to unstable internet connection, we will share the workshop recording with all registered participants. After a 3-week judging process, we will host an Awards Ceremony on 12 August 2022 which is International Youth Day. Depending on prevailing Covid-19 guidelines in Zimbabwe, we will invite the top 10 finalists of the speech and writing categories to attend the ceremony in Zimbabwe's capital, Harare at Batanai Gardens. We will also invite 2 local activists and 1 author from our networks to share their stories of impact and inspire youth to drive social change through digital storytelling. Nyasha and I will be on the ground to coordinate all in-person events. The winners, first runner-ups, and second runner-ups in both the writing and speaking categories will receive a laptop, a tablet, and a smartphone respectively. This will add to a certificate, an individual package of 3 leadership books and an offer to join Think Afrika as contributing writers. We will publish the submissions of all the Top 10 finalists on the Think Afrika website and award 2 leadership books and a certificate to each.

Sustainability

To continue promoting a writing culture and amplifying youth voices towards peacebuilding, we will invite young people to share more articles for review and publication on the Think Afrika 'Voices'⁵ section. We will also provide mentorship to budding writers and public speakers to help shape their paths towards advocacy through storytelling. We hope to establish strong partnerships with media houses and youth organizations in Zimbabwe to organize annual youth day commemorations centered on amplifying youth voices through speech and writing.

About Us

Our 4-member team comprises of Zimbabwean citizens who are passionate about storytelling as a tool for social change. We each have vast experience in blogging, public speaking, entrepreneurship, and advocacy. We are committed to applying our knowledge and skills in areas of interest in order to drive sustainable development in Africa and beyond. Juliana, Takudzwa, and Kuziva are Economics and/or Applied Mathematics majors at US Colleges whilst Nyasha is a medical student in Zimbabwe. At Think Afrika⁶, Kuziva is the Managing Director and Public Policy, Development, and Economics Lead. Takudzwa is the Executive Editor and Technology, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship Lead. Nyasha is a Senior Editor and Women and Girl Child Lead. I, Juliana, am a Senior Editor and Youth, Arts, and Culture Lead. As the portfolio leads, we research and publish content relevant to our portfolio themes. Our main objective is to enhance macro and micro perspectives of Africa through sharing its true and complete stories.

⁴ Think Afrika Story Submission <https://www.thinkafrika.org/submit-story/>

⁵ Voices & Opinions by African Storytellers. <https://www.thinkafrika.org/voices/>

⁶ Think Afrika Leadership <https://www.thinkafrika.org/our-people/>