



Arts for thought: I am a changemaker, so are all of us



Faith Mkwanzani is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow with the Higher Education and Human Development Research Group at the University of the Free State, South Africa. In 2019 Faith was awarded Changing the Story Mobility Funding to attend the HDCA conference at the University College London, to present at the University of Nottingham about the Phase 2 Zimbabwe project of which she is Co-Investigator and to meet up with the Changing the Story Network.

Read all about Faith's trip to the UK below!

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Our project Street Art to Promote Representation and Epistemic Justice among Marginalized Rural Zimbabwean Youth started with a desire that my colleagues and I had in contributing to social cohesion through creative and engaging ways that we had not used in our work before. As researchers who have worked on various projects we wondered how, in our collective desire, we could bring communities together, creating space for the people we work with in our research to think about what they understand to be social cohesion and decide on how they would want to advance this. We decided we wanted to work with young people in Binga, a district along the Zambezi River in Zimbabwe.

Graffiti on board by Willard Muntanga. Picture credit: Author

So the what, who, and where answered, we then decided to look at Street art as a way to promote representation and epistemic justice among rural youth. The Changing the Story team believed in our vision to create a democratic space for the youth to tell the stories they have reason to value and to work with them to encourage social and personal change, within practical realities of course.

Picture credit: Author

In addition to the project, I had the opportunity to expand my knowledge and develop ideas with fellows with similar interests across the UK- thanks to the CTS Mobility Grant. My first stop was the Human Development and Capacity Association Conference at UCL in London. Our team explored methodological issues in operationalising the capability approach from an arts practice perspective and looked at ways in which we can use such methods to tackle obstinate structural forms of violence in society. Our presentation highlighted how street art could promote recognition and build collective capabilities within a society of multiple interdependent ecosystems. We were part of a fascinating panel. In addition to our paper, there were other interesting presentations, and we had further conversations on how arts interlink with human development broadly. For example, in our panel was a presentation that looked at connecting capabilities through music. Meeting with these creative minds in this space was not only refreshing, but also allowed for critical reflection. Reflections on the kinds of research that we embark on, and why we do them. Education. Development. Youth. Creative methods. Why? While the interactions remain critical for my professional development, it is such reflections that brought self-



awareness, helping me understand and recognise how I could become a change maker in my *spheres of association*.

@the HDCA conference in London. Picture Credit: Melis Cin

I also had the opportunity to attend the UKFIET conference in Oxford where I attended multiple workshops that touched on sustainable development, co-creating evidence with participants, engaging policy stakeholders, among many more interesting panels.

@the UKFIET conference in Oxford. Picture credit: Author

There was another highlight. I had the opportunity to network with other scholars interested in arts-based methodologies, across disciplines.

Photo credit: Melis Cin

Thanks to Lancaster University for hosting the networking meeting with fellow CTS grantees, Marlies Kustatscher from the University of Edinburgh, Amrit Verk from the University of Leeds, and Michael Heneise, I got the opportunity to engage with people with a similar appetite for development and change. As we work on Changing the Story projects, this is another example of how the stories of our research journeys get curated. Collectively, we have what it takes to go beyond changing the story, to changing our world, and I am only but a part of the collective. The potential of our collective experiences in our different fields' of expertise – education, development, environment, health, policy, and gender- all brought together to promote inclusion, cohesion, equality and justice, reinvigorates a passion to reach societies beyond my comfort zone. The mutual learning experiences and the possibility for future collaborations were, and continue to be well appreciated. I figured, the strength of a team is as good as the ambition that drives its members. I am a change maker. I am a history maker. So are all of us.

@Lancaster during the networking meeting. From left to right: Tendayi, Marlies, Faith, Melis and Amrit. Photo credit: Melis Cin

The informal engagements that continued during my month long stay in the UK were fruitful for both professional and personal development. We had thought-provoking discussions on development and creative methods with young people. I couldn't be more grateful for the discussions I had with Melis, Tendayi, Amrit and Marlies. This amazing trip ended up with new collaborations,



friendships and intellectual growth!

Special thanks to the CTS Mobility Grant, the youth-owners of the project, our very talented artists Aubrey and Nonny, our current (and future) partners on our CTS project- Basilwizi Trust, Batonga Museum, Bulawayo Art Gallery, National Museums and Monuments in Harare. Thanks Amrit, Marlies, and Michael for the fruitful conversations! Everyone I had conversations with at the HDCA conference, it was great! Thanks Lauren Wray from CTS for the efficiency! Attending UKFIET was also made possible by Alison Buckler at the Open University, thank you! And of course, thanks to my fellow investigators on the Binga project, Melis and Tendayi.







CHANGING THE STORY