LEADERSHIP IS A LOVE AFFAIR

A BLOG BY NOLWANDLE MADE



May 2020 started with much excitement on my part, it was the day for the special webinar event to celebrate the 70th birthday of a legend, former president of Malawi, Her Excellency (HE) Dr Joyce Banda. I, as an African woman had a lot of admiration and if I'm honest hero worship for this trailblazer. After all, Africa and the world does not have a lot of female leaders to look up to. So, ja, I was super-excited and as a member of the organising committee, also super-stressed.

The webinar, titled Leadership in crisis and beyond, was hosted by the Joyce Banda Foundation International (JBFI) in partnership with the African Agricultural Professionals in Europe (AAPE), Ushift Labs, The Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), Mzuzu E-Hub and Sheroes International



Anyway, back to my excitement, the clock seemed to be moving slowly 15H00 came too slowly and quickly, and then it was showtime. It wouldn't be a great event if there a start, the event was organised North America (two US cities); Europe (Sweden) and Africa Ghana and South Africa). So a lot was at stake, what with internet connections having no respect for the auspicious occasion we were planning, it took longer anticipated to connect. However, I am sure our participants panelists alike will surely agree that the wait was well worth it.

I'm unsure that African women in aware particular are two former world leaders, HE Dr Joyce Banda and HE Dr Ellen Johnson Sirleaf shared the same stage. The former president of Mauritius, HE Dr Bibi Ameenah Firdaus Gurib-Fakim, who had greed to be one of the guest speakers had because of a tragic family event. Then of course there was former AU ambassador to the US, Dr Arikana Chihombori-Quao, remember how we were all outraged when she was stripped of her ambassadorship. This Joyce Foundation International: Mrs Thamo Mzobe. CEO RSA Development Agency;

Ms Flossy Menson Executive Director of SHEROES Foundation; Mr Pascal Murasira of Murasira Consult; Ms Wangiwe Joanna Kambuzi, founder of the Mzuzu E-Hub and Mr Harry Akinola of UShift Labs The event was moderated by my mentor and friend, Prof Linley Chiwona-Kalturn, and she did an amazing job to keep things running smoothly after the minor technical difficulties at the beginning. I was enthralled and at times I was too involved in the moment that I forgot to take notes but here are my takeaways from this event:

From Dr Johnson Sirleaf on the occasion of Dr Banda's first state visit which happened to be Dr Sirleaf Johnson's second inauguration: "this was important to show that women can take the mantle to show leadership, especially in Africa". Imagine that moment in Monrovia, Liberia, two world leaders, one being sworn as the president of her country for the second time and the other one having just become the president of her country. What a testament, what a moment, what an example of a shattering glass ceiling. Dr Sirleaf Johnson went on to caution female leaders that they should also learn that leadership is hard and has many hurdles and obstacles along the way, but it can be done. I especially loved the banter between these legends about how young and beautiful they still look, which I have to agree that they do.

Then it was Dr Banda's turn to talk and while she gave an anecdotal account of her rise to the presidency, this is what I learnt: On her first day of office the country had no fuel for the day. Talk about baptism by fire! Two million citizen had no food, no electricity, and a lot of women dying at childbirth. To make matters worse, the IMF was advising her to devalue currency which will devastate the poor. She decided to reconcile everyone, as there was too much conflict in the country. She then set out to reduce maternal mortality by 32%. By the time she left office, In just two years the economy which she had found in tatters had grown by 6%, staple food was in surplus. She finished by saying "leadership is putting people first. People are happy when they have a home, food, school and hospital". In fact her personal mantra, which she echoed here is that "Leadership is a love affair", and listening to what she did for her country in just two years, I can't help but agree.

From Dr Arikana: I particularly liked Dr Arikana's assertion as a medical doctor and a scientist that the world should not dismiss Madagascar's claim that they have found a herbal solution for the coronavirus. She maintained that the WHO should send researchers to Madagascar to test the validity of the claim and not dismiss it out of hand just because it comes from Africa. She also remarked that Africa has all the skills it needs in the continent and the diaspora to prosper Africa. The African diaspora needs to unite and bid for projects usually given to foreign companies. And in her closing remarks when she re-emphasised the AU's goal of gender parity by 2025 and remarked that it is a reasonable goal that can be achieved.

There was no shortage of birthday wishes from the audience all around the world, and to cap what was already an amazing line up of leaders, we had message via a video link from HE Olusegun Obasanjo. He lauded Dr Banda on her working for humanity during her term as president. He ended by saying just because she has retired as a president, hasn't made her to retire from caring for humanity.

I can go on and on about the event, about our panelists and their wonderful input on issues of poverty eradication, entrepreneurship, youth development, local economic development, food security, SME and agricultural development, talent management and other interesting topics. However, I implore you to watch the video for yourself instead and stay tuned for further events on these and other topics.

Thank you to all our participants, your questions and comments were much welcomed and will help us shape the upcoming events. Thank you also to the support team, the backbone to all the IT logistics, Mr Elvis Orlendo; Mr Ozias Hounkpatin and yours truly, for documenting the event, Ms Nolwandle Made.