This campaign is brought to you by OSISA in collaboration with five Creatives to bring you stories of Southern Africa from everyday people whose lives have been affected by COVID-19.
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All transcribed podcasts stories are available online. Scan QR code link available and listen in...
At the peak of the pandemic across Southern Africa, it was the numbers that mattered the most – how many new infections? How many deaths? How many recoveries? Then there were the debates on lockdowns and the extent to which they threatened lives, livelihoods and other broader human rights. Currently, the debate is evolving towards vaccines – ownership, access, safety and production. In the near future, it is quite clear that emerging debates on ‘going back to normal’ will also be animated. For example, when can people start gathering in large groups again? When can domestic, regional and international travel pick-up? Will vaccine passports restrict travel? Will Africa start producing its own vaccines? Will lost jobs come back? Will lockdowns and curfews end? Will COVID-19 end? So many questions...

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Stay safe.
Levi Kabwato
Communications and Advocacy Manager (OSISA)
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“The biggest worry is our children. What culture are they going to follow thereafter? Even the visiting of relatives, Corona does not allow you to visit people. Which means eventually, we are not going to value relationships as far as I’m concerned. We will only value our immediate families like the Western cultures do. Unless we wake up one day and can say Covid is no longer there, we can’t reinstate what was there before. If it goes on for 10 years, tough luck. That’s the end of the culture, the African culture which we have.” - Jairus Mumbure
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**Esther**

My name is Esther. I live in Harare with my two daughters. My daughters and I are survivors of Covid-19, praise God!

**Jairos**

My name is Jairos Mumbure. I was born in this area of Mutare. I am 66 years of age. The biggest worry is our children. What culture are they going to follow thereafter? Even the visiting of relatives, Corona does not allow you to visit people. Which means eventually, we are not going to value relationships as far as I’m concerned. We will only value our immediate families like Western cultures do. Unless we wake up one day and say Covid is no longer there, we can’t reinstate what was there before. If it goes on for 10 years, tough luck. That’s the end of the culture, the African culture which we have.

**Chisomo**

My name is Chisomo. I am from Zomba, Malawi. I lost my mother on the 28th of January to Covid-19. She was in an isolation center in Lilongwe from the 26th to the 28th of January.

One aspect of our lives which is changing is the way we mourn our loved ones. The general procedure of mourning and laying a loved one to rest in both countries usually takes place over the course of a couple of days to a week. This includes an overnight vigil at the home of the deceased, body viewing, a funeral service, and a burial service. In the event that the deceased is to be buried in their home village, the events leading up to the burial included travelling to the deceased’s home village with loved ones. To prevent the risk of transmission, government officials have ordered the public to bury loved ones within 24 hours with a burial team consisting of medical personnel. Overnight vigils are prohibited, funeral services are limited to 50 people, and certain practices that entail a risk of transmission are to be abandoned, for example body washing, kissing, or hugging.

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**Chisomo (Continued)**

I last saw my Mum on the 26th of January when they moved her from the general ward after her test results were confirmed to be positive. On the 26th and the 27th she was in an isolation ward, where you just leave food at the door and you never get to see the patient. On the morning of the 28th, I went to give her breakfast. I went to town to get her more supplies for lunch. An hour later, I was called, they asked me – ‘Are you the guardian of So-and-So?’? I said ‘yes’. They said ‘Please come, there’s some documentation that needs to be filled in’. So, I went to the hospital only to be told that she had passed on and she needs to be buried the same day so I need to organize a coffin and bring a bedsheet to wrap her in.

I rushed home, got the bedsheets and called a funeral parlor to organize the coffin. The hearse arrived around 11am. I was told that by 5pm the body needs to be out of the hospital, because they don’t want the bodies to remain in the mortuary. I didn’t even have time to tell all my relatives. The ministerial health fumigated the body, and once the body was ready... when people came to the house, I just said to them – ‘Let’s go to the graveyard’. They went to the graveyard whilst I went to the hospital to collect the body – then it was straight to the graveyard. We buried her around 6pm when it had already started getting dark, it was just too fast, so surreal. It hadn’t sunk in that she had gone. The time we were burying her if wasn’t even like I was burying my Mum. I was in autopilot. It feels like you’ve been robbed.

I called the church to ask them to come to the graveyard to say some prayers. But they told me that they stopped doing that and they would do the service the following morning at church.

My sister couldn’t travel from South Africa for the funeral. At the hospital we were told that my Mum needed to be buried by 8am the following day. That was not possible so we buried her the same day. It helps when you can bring the person home you know... when you see the coffin, pray, you have family around you consoling you, and you can come to terms with the fact that they’re gone.

The law or the system says don’t group wherever there is a funeral. That’s when you see how painful it is when a parent dies – story continues on next page
the brothers they don’t come there, the sisters don’t come there, the close relatives, even the neighbors can’t come there. It’s as if the community has thrown the person, and shown no remorse to the person. When a person dies, the normal cultural progression is that the body sleeps in his home... to appease the spirits, the spirits must enjoy the period in which the body lived in the home but now we don’t have that. The body comes from the mortuary and goes straight into the grave. Even at the grave itself, there are some cultural practices which need to be performed whereby people surround the grave, very close singing and dancing while the process is happening... even the Reverend and pastors will be praying for the body, for the soul of the person which is going for the last time... that is not happening. Instead, you only get a few ministry of health people coming in to spray the body, to kill the bacteria of whatever is surrounding the place and people are forced to stand up to 30 meters away. This is not the way a cultural funeral is supposed to be. After the funeral people are meant to come back to the home of the deceased, they share whatever has been going on in their houses. The following day of the funeral, people come together again to dispose of the clothes the person had and that is not there anymore.

Chisomo
Because of Covid, there is a lot of stigma. Even at the graveyard, there are just a few people, far away from the grave. I was the only one, along with the medical personnel who were close to the grave. I even drove my own car to the grave because no one would give me a lift. I was the primary guardian for my Mum so everyone was moving away from me. Even up to now, people think that if they say ‘hi’ to you they will get Covid. People don’t understand. What if it was a child mourning their mother? They would never get their head around the fact that their Mum is gone because you have skipped the first stage of grieving. Imagine people running away from you, not wanting to console you... You are just alone. Explaining the concept of death to a young child is difficult already. It’s sad.

Normally when someone dies... let’s say they die in Lilongwe and their home is in Mzimba, they are buried in Mzimba. But now, most people are buried at the nearest hospital because the medical personnel have to help with the process. The culture has been disrupted because you don’t get to go to your home village. If you travel home for the burial you may not make it within the 24 hours that you are given.

Jairos
When we talk about the value and ethics our culture, we can say that this is a period of erosion. I used to wonder why in Western culture, people would invite people to certain things like funerals and maybe weddings. The cultural erosion with respect to weddings is more or less the same. Traditionally, a wedding is a big ceremony. You have so many people getting involved... you’ve got the neighbors, you’ve got what we call the Samukuru’s the people who lead the process of the marriage, you’ve got the Tete’s who are the aunts who stand for the girl who is getting married... you’ve got the Uncles, the brothers and sisters. The house might be full... you could have 30+ people in a home depending on how big the family is. Even with the wedding itself... no more than 50 people are allowed to gather in a place together. Traditional weddings could accommodate up to 1000 people depending on how popular the family is, but now this is prohibited. It’s as if we don’t like each other because of this system that is going on. It is really affecting the African culture.

Kondwani
Hi my name is Kondwani and I am a photographer, a film-maker and co-founder of Unrivalled Studios in Lilongwe – a creative studio providing Graphic Design, Photography, and Film Services. Since the beginning of the Coronavirus in March 2019, we have been specializing in providing online video streaming services for our clients including streaming services for funerals. Although the prevalence of the Corona Virus has made it difficult for people to meet in person and console each other in a time we need it the most, being online has maintained a sense of community in our society.

Jairos
When a person is not feeling well, you visit the person, you set up routines to take care of the person as a family, as a community. Because of how infectious Covid is, people have to go into isolation when they are sick.

Esther
As a survivor of Covid-19 I am very happy and grateful to God but it was a very painful journey. I went four weeks without eating anything, my body was itching, I couldn’t feel anything. We had to boil water every day, cover ourselves with blankets, and take tablets for headaches. We used our African medicine which we call Zumbani, 5 to 6 times a day because it was very difficult to breathe. So I survived. I am 88 years old, both my daughters had it and we all survived. We used to open our windows every morning, drink hot water, drink tea after every 30 minutes. We ate Sadza with Black Jack because nothing was good for us. We only drank tea with lemon. The body was hot and itchy but I’m here now, I survived and am grateful to God. God bless you all.

Zumbani is the Shona term for ‘Lippia Javanica or the Fever Tea Tree. When crushed, its leaves give off a strong lemon-like smell. It is said to be one of the most aromatic of Zimbabwe’s indigenous shrubs. The Fever Tea Tree is widely distributed throughout Zimbabwe, in all natural regions. It can grow under difficult circumstances requiring very little maintenance. It thrives in sunny areas and can easily be cultivated from its seeds or cuttings. Smallholder farmers harvest the leaves of the Zumbani between March and April and an individual can produce up to 200kg of dry leaf material a year.
The concept of love has shifted in the minds of many people during this pandemic and it has re-framed the entire space in which people interact. For some, it seems impossible to remember what interacting without a mask was like, or not having to take precautions whenever they enter a new room. But on the other end, there is the concept of loss which has changed as well. Loss has also been a daily constant in many people’s lives - as COVID-19 cases increased globally - so did the death toll.

As discussed previously the concept of space has been altered and has affected all elements of life including love and loss. Where funerals have been conducted Online via video calls, and where some cannot directly see their loved ones after they have passed, further shows that the space in which humans are interacting has been moulded by a global situation.

With dating applications being one of the most social-changing elements of the new technological world, an adaption has formed where it is a norm to meet Online first and then in person afterward. However, with COVID-19 halting the second process - finding friends and finding love has changed even more. When restrictions are placed on something that is known to be spontaneous and heartfelt, unusually, it has now been monitored. Interested in the way in which society has adapted and normalized the new way in which dating and making new friends occurred I interviewed a selection of young adults in South Africa to get their perspective of it.

According to one of the interviewees - the pandemic was a chance to take a “friend inventory” where she would evaluate whether or not certain friendships were worth maintaining and which friendships were worth fighting for. She found that love and loss were attached to this - because she tried to reconnect with a long-lost friend. Their friendship that was previously one with 5-year gaps turned into a relationship however after finding this new bond - there were frustrations due to the lock-down. The new couple could not see each other as regularly as they’d like - her family had begun to question her leaving the house. As the relationship continued - she was more comfortable with declining social gatherings without having to explain herself. Although she is an introvert she
realized how important socialization was. Her mental and emotional health was affected by the pandemic - and although there is comfort for those surrounded by family there is also a frustration attached to it - as no space is often warranted.

The idea of a relationship blossoming within a pandemic is a sign of hopefulness. But the question is how much can we reframe our mindsets around what relationships are like now? In a way it is subjective to those experiencing it - those who are adventurous and enjoy change might find this new technological substitution for affection confusing. And those who are introverted and enjoy the comfort for consistency might be put at ease by the fact that they are not socially obligated to attend anything.

There has also been a level of fear and guilt attached to living “freely”. People who have parents, grandparents, and elders around them have often been protective of their loved ones - knowing that one act of carelessness or putting themselves at risk not only makes them carriers but places their elders in a compromising position. Fear is also an emotion that takes up space of the person feeling and those around them.

Taxi drivers have been some of the most interesting people to interview - there is a wide array of safety precautions that take place in a small space such as a back seat. This was incredibly interesting to observe because it showcased how three different people who have the same occupation were so different in their responses to the pandemic. Three different taxi rides have resulted in three different responses. The first was with a driver who was not wearing a mask - and did not feel the need to ask if the passenger was wearing one. When the topic of safety arose - he put the mask on only out of courtesy and not out of a sense of urgency. The second ride was with a driver who had sanitizer in his back seat and his windows were rolled down slightly as well to welcome fresh air - they were wearing a mask and immediately started talking about the pandemic and how they wanted to prevent it from getting worse. The third ride was a little bit different - the interior of the car had a plastic arc in its centre and when asked what it was the driver responded that it was previously a barrier between them and the passenger. But to my surprise he said that he removed it after passengers complained about it.

Such a small space can tell so many variations of one story. When considering how love has transformed over time - we are forced to adapt. It is debatable whether people have gotten kinder to one another because of our unifying circumstance or if they are simply frustrated with others for not complying with the rules. Wear a mask. Use Sanitizer. Be mindful and considerate of others. About a week into March I was standing in a line in a supermarket and overheard a man shouting at the woman next to him because she kindly asked him to stand a meter away from her. He was with his partner and their two children - and he proceeded to invade the personal space of the woman who was paying the cashier at the time. He demanded that she moved - as she was the one who was uncomfortable not him. This was a very difficult scenario to watch but the relief was found when the man in another aisle defended her and told him to move out of her space and follow the rules of the supermarket. When the woman finally paid she was almost in tears and I stopped her to talk to her. Not only was she visibly upset about being yelled at by
a stranger, and clearly in the right-she was more upset that her space was violated and that he could not see that. On the other hand - I tried to imagine what the man who was shouting at her was feeling to have been that strong with his opinions. Perhaps his space was being taken away just as fast as he was infiltrating hers. To discuss this a year after the pandemic started seems normal - but it is hard to remember life before wearing masks, standing away from those around us and isolating ourselves from our family to protect them. What is fascinating about human interactions is what people find the most important - for some its family, for others its justice, and sometimes its freedom. There are often clashes between these values and I believe that they have been heightened since the pandemic started.

Love and loss have been constant. As people lose loved ones, opportunities, freedom, and their sense of space, it seems as if love amplifies even more. Love can take many forms as well - it can be a passion, speaking one’s mind, becoming closer to those we care about, and also focusing on what we love to do. The world often works in polarities - we realize how fortunate we are only when we are placed in a contrasting position. This is a concept that is vital and needs to happen for compassion to take place. As we evaluate the cases that are increasing or declining we become more conscious of our freedom and respectively our isolation.

COVID-19 has brought to light some of the most prominent human emotions and emphasized them. It has made spaces between people wider and simultaneously forced them to be closer to those they love. The dating world has already changed as there are more moments of hesitation when it comes to meeting new people. As inner circles become closer people tend to rely on the relationships they have already formed. Forming bonds with people allow people to feel seen and to help evaluate what their place in the world is concerning others. This has also been a very tumultuous time where the loss of loved ones has also caused introspection of those who left behind.

Funerals have also been altered and communities and cultures have rituals and beliefs that have had to be practiced under COVID-19 restrictions. When mourning a loved one who has passed, one does not often think about the regulations that they must follow - they simply want to feel. Funeral homes have had to adjust their practice, and drive-through viewings and Online zoom recordings have become more common. The time to comfort and feel support is at crucial times such as this - but the question is how do we practice safe support?

This is not to say that there is no light at the end of the tunnel or that we can never find love amid the pandemic. When interviewing a filmmaker about his experience with love - he spoke about matching on a social media app with a person who was a barista. They continued to talk over time and decided to meet by going away on a short trip to get to know each other. When they met, both were meeting with a mask on and the first initial meeting did not show their entire faces. They bonded incredibly fast and cooked together and watched music videos together all night. What this interviewee found interesting was that there were no expectations - they only got to know each other. They worked on a way to see each other again - and eventually, he introduced them to his family.
Scan and Listen to Podcast HERE
"Not that it’s not important, but at that moment I felt like there’s been enough Covid-19 awareness music. I felt that there was a need for someone to speak up about what is happening and what people are going through."

In our previous episodes, Shoeshine from Lerotho shared a moving story of her experience contracting Covid, recovering, and losing her father. I remember throughout January in Malawi was quite hectic in the sense that every day I was hearing news of someone I know losing a loved one on social media. It was so disturbing and it always felt like ‘Who’s next’. It was like we were all grieving. Even if you hadn’t lost a friend or a family member, you knew someone who did and you were grieving with them.

A popular Malawian Hip-Hop artist named Suffix released a single encapsulating the height of the emotions during this time and I had the honour of speaking to him about the song over the phone. The title of the song is ‘Misoo’ which translates as ‘Tears’ from Chichewa.

Hi, I’m Aubrey, AKA Suffix Shambu, I am a hip-hop artist based in the capital city of Malawi which is Lilongwe and I am also an economist by profession.

First of all, thank you for making this song and thank you for taking the time to put the creative effort in to articulate the type of pain that lots of people struggle to talk about or express. Please walk us through the songwriting process.

Yeah, it was crazy. I remember I was having a bad time... my two friends and I went to Karonga for a weekend and whilst we were there one of my friends lost his favorite uncle to Covid-19. You know it was a sad moment so we had to drive back on Sunday and as we were driving back, we were listening to some slow music, just encouraging our friend. We got a call from another friend of ours to say he had just lost his Mum three days after he lost his Dad, buried his Dad to Covid-19 also. It was so emotional and confusing. Not that it’s not important, but at that moment I felt like there’s been enough Covid-19 awareness music. I felt that there was a need for someone to speak up about what is happening and what people are going through... I was just thinking out loud. That’s when the concept came up. I called one of my producers from Manifest and I said ‘I need someone, a girl, a lady, on the hook’ and I called Esther Chiteka. We went to the studio together; we were working on the beat whilst I was writing my verse. I think we recorded around midnight.

I’ve noticed that your music usually touches on important topics, issues that affect our society. Why is this important to you?

Well, as an artist I think it’s important first of all to define yourself, to know who you are, and to find a way to connect with the people – with the audience. I realized this 2/3 years ago through some friends, one of my friends who listens to my music. He said to me ‘Look, I think you need to focus on your strengths, and your strengths are coming up with content or concepts that people

I can see that you were in a real hospital and the medical personnel were wearing full protective wear... fantastic imagery! What was it like shooting the music video?

Actually it was the Bingu Stadium Isolation Centre, where the Covid patients are being treated. I have a friend who is a physiotherapist in Blantyre. I called him and told him I have this concept which is just talking about what we are going through as a nation and also just giving props to our health workers for the commendable job that they are doing and I wanted to know if it is possible to feature them in the music video. He said ‘Wow, that’s a very good idea’, so he connected me with a supervisor from Bingu Isolation Centre, and the supervisor asked for permission from the director of Kamuzu Central Hospital. I got a letter which would permit me to enter the isolation center because there were guards, there was heavy security. Also, I reached out to Kips restaurant and they provided free lunch for the health workers. So we went there with the videographers. We had a few hiccups with the MDF (Malawi Defense Force) guards, even though they saw the letter from the director of KCH (Kamuzu Central Hospital), they still didn’t want to let us in. We waited for an hour and thirty minutes. I think we still have a long way to go in Malawi, because we told them about the concept and about the music video but they didn’t take us seriously, they thought ‘it’s just hip hop’, ‘it’s just the youth trying to play around’. I think God we were finally allowed to enter. We went inside, I just loved how happy the health workers were. Some of them knew me as an artist... We had a brief conversation, encouraging them, applauding the work that they are doing. We had a good time!

So the scenes in the video you speaking to them was all in real-time, you encouraging them?

Exactly! Big shout out to the videographers - Ubwino and his friends because I actually didn’t know they were shooting the video when I was talking to the health workers, so it came out quite nice.

“I just loved how happy the health workers were. Some of them knew me as an artist... We had a brief conversation, encouraging them, applauding the work that they are doing. We had a good time!”

What do you think of the campaigns that are being done to sensitize the country on Covid-19? Are we doing enough?

I think we are doing enough and the government is really trying, artists have tried, organizations have tried to sensitize people. I live in urban Malawi so I can’t speak for the people that are in rural areas because I don’t know about their experiences. However, in the city, there are people who are still not abiding to the rules, it’s just negligence. Otherwise everyone knows just how dangerous Covid-19 is and radio stations have done a good job, TV stations, social media, we have no excuse. I have seen the numbers have gone down a lot and there is a hope that we will get through this.
22 March 2021
By Bonolo Mfikwe

Hello, my name is Bonolo, I’m from Pretoria. Honestly, I first heard about Corona in 2019. The breakout was in China and I heard about it on the news, and I really didn’t care much. It was just another thing where I felt like, this was just another outbreak that will probably just blow over, the same way we lived with Ebola, the same way we lived with malaria. You would hear that there is an outbreak and as time goes on a vaccine is found or a cure and life goes on. I really didn’t think much of it. Even when it was being reported, I don’t think even the experts themselves were confident in the information that they were sharing with us. There was a point when they thought that masks were not helpful, then there was a point where they were saying ‘this disease is airborne’, then ‘this disease is not airborne’. There was just so much uncertainty about it, I didn’t really think about it. I think it started getting closer to home when at my work place, I remember wanting to go back to the office and receiving emails the night before that no one should come back to the office because there had been a positive case.

When the president announced the hard lockdown I remember talking to my mum over the phone and she was like ‘come home’ because I was staying alone… she was saying this thing is a mental thing now and it’s going to eat you up because you’ll be alone, away from home, without your family so it’s best that you come back home. The following day I packed my stuff and went to my parents’ house. It was tense… I stay in a township and it’s always busy. A township is never quiet. I got home and the weeks after the hard lockdown or the days after, you could feel the tension in the air. You couldn’t just walk anyhow or go to the Spaza shop. I could not go outside as there were so many restrictions. The atmosphere was just so cold and it was scary I’ve never felt something like this before. I would literally go to the backyard and see a police van pass by. I would see those big cars that soldiers usually drive by with and it created a lot of anxiety for me. That’s when I began to realize how serious this thing was. This thing was not a joke. It was here and we needed to follow the guidelines that were put in place.
The first family member to test positive was my aunt, my mother’s younger sister. She was like a second mother to me. We lost her on the 17th of June, 2020 and on the 30th of June we lost her husband. When my aunt got ill, I promise you, COVID-19 was the last thing on our minds because I’m gifted with the way I use traditional medicine. Whatever medication I was giving her was helping the symptoms but you could see that she was still not okay. The loss of taste then the loss of smell, she also complained about headaches; it was a mixture of symptoms. Whatever symptoms she would complain about I was helping her with that. Because she is someone who has been in and out of hospital, even pre-COVID-19. It was a miracle for a year to go by without her being admitted into a hospital. Which is why, COVID-19 for us was not something we suspected.

The following day when we decided to take her to the hospital, we just said ‘let’s take her there so she can get something’. She was not eating, and her temperature was very high. I remember if you’d just get close to her, you could feel how hot she was. I remember when we took her to the hospital and her exact words were ‘You actually helped me with my headache and the dizziness’. She said ‘When I come out of the hospital, you’ll be the one to thank’. She didn’t want to go to the hospital, we were the ones who were pushing her. On Sunday afternoon, it was confirmed that it was COVID-19. We felt optimistic, I remember we were praying every night. Keep in mind, her husband, a frontline worker was at home at this time but he was also starting to feel unwell. Because we were focusing on my aunt, we did not pay much attention to him. Two days later, on Wednesday, I remember my cousin called me – the daughter of my aunt called me and I just knew she was gone... my cousin didn’t even need to say a word. My family is very close so initially when I told them, their instinct was to just rush there. The thing is, we couldn’t do that anymore... what precautions do we need to take? Who has sanitizers? What do we need to do? I have other aunts who are older and have chronic illnesses. It was that thing of ‘who should stay, who should go?’. I remember my cousin calling, crying for help, because her father was there and he was also sick. I now understand that this virus is bigger than me, but because I didn’t get it at that point, I felt like I had failed my aunt by not being able to help her with my gift. I know it’s something even my family struggles with today. Guys, COVID-19 funerals are SO cold... the fact that we can’t view the body which is something that brings some closure. The fact that the body is not even able to come into the homestead. The fact that the last time we saw her was when we took her to the hospital, it’s such a painful thing to even think about. The way the coffin was being carried. It’s just so cold. The funeral the whole ceremony, it’s too painful. That’s something that I don’t think I’ll ever forget. My aunt took a picture of herself in the hospital, she had an oxygen mask on... she just looked so lonely, we can’t visit her, she is alone, she is probably scared. Even the nurses were treating her in some type of way, but I understand why because they were also taking precautions.

Fast forward, my aunt was buried. Now her husband... he got worse by the day. I stayed with him after the funeral and it was terrible. He was now complaining about not being able to breathe and he refused to go to the hospital. On the day he actually agreed in the morning, we were waiting for the car. While he was in the bathroom, that’s where he also took his last breath – on that morning he was meant to go to the hospital. Personally, that was a very traumatic experience because I have never seen someone take their last breath in front of me. If I was feeling this way, how are their kids feeling? Because they are losing both parents in a matter of 8 days. Those are the people I lost last year to this demon. I won’t lie, 2020 was a year of a lot of loss. We’re still grieving as a family. We all heal differently, our grieving looks different but this whole thing has brought us closer together, we are tighter as a family.
Shoeshoe

Losing a loved one in a pandemic

PART 2

22 March 2021
By Shoeshoe Mofokeng

My name is Shoeshoe Mofokeng. I am a social worker by profession and I have been working in the early childhood care and development sector in the different ministries for more than 10 years. On the 5th of January 2021, I turned 35 and my dad had just turned 60 as he was born on January 3rd.

On the 8th of January we both fell sick. My dad was coughing and because we had seen and heard of the signs and symptoms of Covid-19 from different media sources my mother suspected that my dad had Covid-19 and he needed to take the necessary precautions such as wearing a mask and get some cough medication. I also began showing symptoms of Covid-19. I live 5 minutes away from my parents’ house so my mother recommended that I should isolate at my house while my father isolated in their bedroom. I was alone as I live alone. My partner came to check on me on a daily basis, to check whether I had eaten, whether I had taken my medication. I got very sick, and at first, we were just suspecting, we were not
even sure whether or not it was Covid-19. I got worse and called a doctor who came to check on me. The doctor confirmed that indeed I had contracted Covid-19. He prescribed some medication for me which my partner went to get. My dad on the other hand was getting worse. He had also tested positive and the doctor confirmed that he had Covid-19.

I tried to understand how I got Covid-19 because I was trying everything I could in order to be safe. I was wearing a mask, I was washing my hands, I tried my level best never to touch my face, I tried to eat right, I ate lots of fruits, I drank lots of fluids, I used the traditional medicine to steam, and I was also taking the prescribed medicine from the doctor. My father was also using the traditional medicine of steaming, he also took the prescribed medication from the doctor who tested us and confirmed that we were both positive. I got worse. I used to have severe chest pains when I coughed. I had a dry cough and emotionally I was drained, especially at night when I would cough until I needed to wake up and sit. When I was coughing, I felt like at some point I was going to die. I was running short of breath sometimes as I got very sick. I could see in my partner’s eyes that I was sick but I kept holding on. I could also see, when my son came to see me that he was worried that mummy might not make it, even the way my mother looked at me. But what I didn’t know is that my father was also getting worse.

One night when I was very sick, I called my father, I asked him how he was and…. my father cried… my father used to call me ‘princess’ in my language. He only called me by my real name when he was upset with me. He was like…… which means ‘Princess I am scared’…. I have never heard or seen my father cry. He cried and then he dropped the phone. I called my partner to take me home because I could not drive myself, then when I got there my mother told me that ‘You know your father, he probably cried because he misses you. He always wants you by his side, but because you are both sick, you cannot be in the same house… and when I got there, I could see that my father was different. There was something different about his eyes. He asked me ‘How do you feel? Are you better?’ And I said yes daddy, I am better… and he said, ‘Okay, if you are better it also means that I will be better’, and then I left because I could not stay in my parents’ house I needed to be isolated. The following day my mother called me, she cried she was scared. She told me that my father is not doing good but she doesn’t want my father to go to the hospital because people don’t come back. Most people who had Covid-19 did not come back from the hospital but I convinced my mother to take my father to the hospital. I told her if he dies in the house, it will scare you and people will think that you denied him the opportunity to get professional help…. My mother and my younger brother then took my father to a private clinic. When they got there, he was immediately put on oxygen as his oxygen levels were very low. They then organized for him to go to a public hospital, to be specific Berea hospital, which the government of Lesotho had identified as one of the facilities which would take in people who had Covid-19.

My friend who is a nurse there told me that my father was getting better…. But the following day while I was asleep, it was 11 o’clock at night, I heard a knock, I heard my brother screaming for me. I got up and I shouted at him like, ‘what do you want? It’s late and you are disturbing my neighbors’. He said to me, ‘Your father is gone’. I asked him, ‘Gone where?’, and he said ‘Our father is dead’. He cried and I could not cry because I am the eldest, I had to make sure that my younger brother was fine then I drove home with him and I couldn’t cry. I couldn’t cry because if I did who would help them calm down? And then when they slept, I cried myself to sleep. I always thought I knew what pain was, but the pain I felt that day…
“I remember when we nearly broke the Internet. It was my first day back at work this year because I had taken leave and he came through to work. We had a chat and took cute pictures, and 30 minutes later when I checked my phone, he had posted pictures and the Internet went crazy. I think this is the first person I’ve dated, who’s free enough to go public about a gay relationship”.  - Mphisa Kgakane

27 March 2021
Edited by Ingrid Bame

This episode features an interview of Mphisa Kgakane, on how he and his partner navigated their relationship during the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020 and 2021. He shares about falling in love with an old friend and keeping the flame alive while grappling a global pandemic.
Ingrid: Please introduce yourself, where you’re from, if you are in a relationship and how long you’ve been with your partner?

Mphisa: Hey. My name is Mphisa Edwin Kgakane, and I am from Lesotho, I live in Maseru at Abia. I’m in a relationship yes. It’s been 5 months now, counting from December. And it’s been a joy ride so far. We’re finishing off the last days of the honeymoon phase and it’s just so nice and beautiful. I think I’m happy, regardless of the current situation of COVID. I am in a relationship with Abiele Lekulo, and it’s been a long journey really. We met a couple of years back, but we were just good friends. When he went to school in South Africa, and we were still communicating but when he came back, we started rekindling the flame and we decided let’s just do this. Because we literally know each other we decided, let’s make it official.

Ingrid: With the initial breakout of COVID-19 and most of the world going into a lockdown, did you ever think the lockdown or COVID-19 would have an impact on your relationship?

Mphisa: One of the reasons why we delayed dating earlier last year was because of the up and down situation of lockdown and then going back to reality with restrictions. We live in different areas, so there was a curfew. With the lockdown you could only go to town for essential services. So, having a social visit was like taking a risk of getting arrested for going somewhere that does not provide essential services. But after everything calmed down a little, towards the end of the year, we started seeing each other on a regular basis. However, earlier this year we had another lockdown, which was very stressful. But I think we were very crafty about it because for a whole week and a half, I spend time at his house. And when he brought me back to my house, he spent about a week and two days here. We tried to alternate like that because frequent visits would mean that we’d have to take the risk of going to a place which does not offer the essential services. But then, we ended up making it work. Well luckily, he is one of those people that works on the frontline, so he had a permit. But you don’t want to abuse the power that you’re given. We made it work.

Ingrid: Because the COVID-19 safety to stay home and avoid visiting friends and family. Were you and your partner concerned about not seeing each other as regularly as you usually would?

Mphisa: Like I mentioned earlier, with the restrictions and all, visitations to friends of family were a bit of an issue and then there was curfew as well. But we were very smart about it because the actual date of lockdown, I moved in with him for a week and a half. So, we basically saw each other for a week and a half. When the lockdown was getting a little bit settled, I was able to go back to my house, where we took a few days apart before he could come over to my house for a week’s visit. But really, it was risky. It was a whole Jumanji. Trying to sneak out of your house and go to somebody's place because there were soldiers and policeman everywhere patrolling. So, you had to have a legit reason why you went out of your house. The point of just wanting to see somebody. You will do almost anything. I think we took measures to maintain that we are still safe. Because the first time when he came through to my house, I remember saying “you are taking off all of those clothes, taking a shower and
then we shall put the clothes in the laundry because I don’t know where you were. You might have met somebody or whatever”. I think at the end of the day we tried. We had to buy sanitiser and then there was steaming. At the end of the day safety is key.

Ingrid: Was intimacy in your relationship affected by COVID-19? Did you have to refrain from, kissing, touching and being intimate with your partner?

Mphisa: In terms of intimacy, we were a bit skeptic the first time when things really got hectic during the early days of lockdown, but like I said, we usually tried almost any remedy that people were suggesting and steaming. So, I think we just decided that if we are going to do this, we’re going to try to be safe about it. We would steam, we would have those regular remedies almost everyday, so that we don’t have any issues of not having to be intimate or just sleeping in one bed or being in one house. So, when it comes to intimacy, I think for the first few days it was a bit... We were stepping on eggshells, but we then decided, let’s just be safe. Try this, and then we can go ahead and keep the fire burning. And we did.

I remember, there was a point in time towards the last days of the lockdown this year when he caught a flue. I was so scared. He was at my house and I had to nurse him back to health. But when you consider going to the hospital, you’re also afraid that if it’s not COVID, you might end up getting COVID. We might as well treat the flue at home and see how it goes. So, I think we kind of suffered when we would sit on different couches and he would sleep in the lounge and I would sleep in the bedroom. The last days were a bit hectic because of that situation.

Ingrid: Can you tell us about a humorous or enlightening situation you and your partner found yourself in during the pandemic?

Mphisa: I’m in a relationship with a very funny human being. And I think I have a couple of scenarios where we would have a laugh till you got tired. Usually once a week, which was set for maybe Wednesday or Friday, I’d do my facial. Face-mask, steam, scrubs and all those facial treatments. So, I introduced him to that, and I remember the first time when he tried on the mask - a charcoal mask which is black, and he’s dark in complexion. He came out of the bathroom acting like a zombie or like a monster from the movies. He started acting stupid and making sounds, and I just looked at him and was like, “wow really. We were definitely acting like 12-year-olds, but I liked it. I had a laugh for days. I’d also make fun of him when we were steaming. He felt like he was suffocating because he couldn’t stay under the blanket for at least two minutes. So, he’d take a break and go back in. I’m like “you such a baby”. We always found humour in a lot of things. Like when we watch movies, he’d just make jokes out of the characters or certain situation that’s on TV and we’ll just laugh. Because he always finds humour in a serious issue. He will make you feel comfortable and make you laugh, and just make a joke out of it all.

Ingrid: If you had to give advice to a couples on how to best navigate a relationship during a global pandemic, what would your advice be?

Mphisa: I think one advice I would give to people who are in relationships or will be in future relationships is, when you love somebody and you really want to make it work, you just have to take the...
risk. You don’t know what the future holds. We all are human at the end of the day. We all have a past, and we all have aspirations. We all want to be loved at some point. And if you find that somebody, and you feel like they’ll hold your hand and go through the emotions and everything with you, take the risk. Make it work. But still maintaining because COVID is really taking a lot of lives. I would say, take calculated risks. Try to be as safe as possible because you can’t just take a risk and take a walk or take a car to your partners house and when you get there, act like you just left the house to go outside to get some fresh air. You need to take measures. Right now, everybody’s sanitising. So, you need to sanitise, get rid of the clothes, take a shower, put on new clothes, so that at least whatever that you contracted outside remains on those clothes. Put them in the laundry immediately so that it does not contaminate others because there are a lot of theories on how COVID spreads. So, when you take a calculated risk like that one, it makes things very easy. Also, don’t be afraid to love. Love is a beautiful thing. I find myself smiling every time when I think of Abiele -when I think of my partner. Because he makes me laugh. He builds me. I feel like in my past relationship it was not even a relationship. It was like a situation where two people were just spending time together. You can see when somebody wants to build, so that there’s a future for both of you. Not just a future for them, or for them to learn how to be in a relationship. They want to involve you in certain things because in the future, it won’t just be them. It will be for both of you, for a family. If you decided to have a family. So, I think it’s letting go of your insecurities, taking calculated risks and just letting yourself be loved. Because when you love, open your heart to love, or a relationship, everything goes on so smoothly. Not that I’m saying relationships are perfect. A lot of people make mistakes, and forgiveness is one of the other things that really make a relationship work. So, forgive, take risks, love, and let yourself be loved.
Love and Dating during a pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a new norm which is distancing us from each other and it’s not just physical but also an intimate disconnection between couples. We have to learn to be together even though we can’t be physically present like we could in the past.
Emotional And Financial stress on Young Adults and Creatives
(A discussion on mental health during COVID-19)

18 March 2021
By Amy-Leigh Braaf
Photos by Meri Hyöky for The Hub

There was an interesting introduction to an interview I conducted with a young adult who worked for an NGO. He was aware that his story is not a bad one - because he’s been incredibly lucky during a tough period. His job was easy to do remotely so the transition was not difficult. Mid-twenty-year-old who had been studying for a long time, he wanted to get out of that by moving somewhere else - Johannesburg- and started work. Initially, he felt that his work was fun and interesting - the main purpose was to connect with other people’s lives.

When COVID-19 hit - he made a very eye-opening statement that he “followed work to a place - and work had become very slow”. The fact that he was seeking direction and purpose in a new job to overcome the feeling of complacency - to be met with predictability and a sense of being controlled by your work - did not provide the best outcome.

He was in the same room every day from 8 am to 5 pm behind his computer not necessarily working on anything. Academic grants are what he worked with and they can be removed as quickly as they come. This lack of work had caused an existential crisis because he was questioning why he had left an academic world behind. This period of uncertainty had created a point of feeling unanchored and wondering what the point of life was. Being a part of a collective that has direction helped him - and living with 5 other people aided him in not feeling alone. But he could not escape them either - as it was a lockdown, and he didn’t know anybody in the city.
The fact that reprieve was never possible - meant that his mental health was altered and it caused him to question his place in the world.

An actress (25) had moved back to her mother’s home when the pandemic hit, and her financial strain was incredibly tough on her. As her mother was struggling too she focused on helping her with her work and letting her resources decline. She then decided to move to Johannesburg and to make a new start but had to try and find work to pay for rent and in a field that was not what she initially studied.

Other young adults have finished studying and are hoping to start the new part of their lives: through their first jobs, traveling, or even applying for part-time jobs to help them with financial strains. When the pandemic hit the guilt that was placed on many young adults was that their parents needed more help than ever before. The early stages of adulthood require stepping stones and these can come in multiple forms. With help from financial aids for studying further, getting help from family to pay for groceries, and even asking for financial help when trying to pay for medical costs - young people often financially dependent on those close to them.

This dependent nature is not a general state of being for all young adults - but it is also a time of transitioning in this drastic change from being sheltered (in whatever form it was) can cause a serious mental shift when it is taken away. Emotional and financial strains are very hard to keep separated when they are directly linked to one another. The focus that is spent on each young individual must be met with another level of empathy - the emotional effects of many young people who are disappointed with the outcomes of their hard work can linger and taint other areas of their life. If they don’t feel supported they can often fall into destructive habits to ease their pain and tension. Support groups and close communities are essential in tracking the development of young adults and creatives as they navigate the new world. COVID-19 hit the world hard - and each individual must be understood based on their experiences and their emotional and financial situations to fully comprehend what they are feeling during this time.
The effects of COVID-19 on artists have been noticeably different now that there have been grants given out. Whether these grants were provided for creatives who have been overlooked because of their profession or for those who need funding to continue their respective projects - it has been much needed. There are interviews that have been conducted to try and understand the emotional impact that the pandemic has caused on artists and also their creative spaces and I will explore these further.

The idea of a space being affected by a virus can be an unusual way to view the impact it has caused however when some artists like musicians solely depend on the mass amount of people collecting in one space to witness their work being made it can be a very jarring change to have that space removed and monitored constantly. Live gigs and performances were abruptly stopped and artists had to find new sources of income from working remotely. When interviewing a young musician in Johannesburg who had contracted COVID-19 along with his girlfriend he discussed why the pandemic affected his career. Performing his music live stopped and because of lockdown restrictions, the changing curfew and alcohol bans have made work for him incredibly hard. The concept of festivals and markets has dissolved so much that according to said musician “getting permission from the government is another huge hurdle to get passed” especially in terms of regulating.

Dance classes have also been affected where masks must be worn the entire time - which is necessary. In the same breath, the natural state of these activities has been reshaped and those who have chosen these career paths are required to adapt. When speaking to an animator based in Johannesburg, he stated that marketing budgets that have gone to live-action productions have now been channelled into animation because it’s safer, has fewer regulations, and contains a smaller crew. This artist believed that they have benefitted more now than before because of this niche field because it doesn’t require being physically present. Agencies that normally wouldn’t hire an artist based on where they live would reconsider doing this now because the location is not a factor. Burnout, however, has a larger role now because of the mass amount of work needed to be done and the huge surplus of positions that are available to a specialized animator. Although he says that he benefits from this, it is also a huge amount of pressure to deliver for multiple projects at once.

The fear of not having work for artists, in particular, is extremely present - as the arts has been felt by some to be dismissed in comparison to other professions. With this fear comes an urgency to take on any job that presents itself to the artist and as a result, the artist is taking on too much work than they can handle. With weddings being cancelled in 2020, has caused financial strain on wedding photographers who sometimes solely depend on these jobs which are often booked ahead of time.

As a freelancer - jobs often need to be planned according to the rent the artist needs to pay as well as their other responsibilities such as utilities, their online subscriptions, their food costs as well as many other things. If freelancing during a pandemic - an artist can often find themselves living day to day - scoping for jobs in a saturated market and finding themselves charging less than they normally would just because they need a job. Some artists have been fortunate enough to receive grants to support projects they have been working on individually or as teams and some organizations have also been funded to continue to help other artists on a smaller scale.

With time we have been able to observe the dramatic social changes around us and as we grow to navigate spaces mentally, emotionally, and physically we can also learn to empathize. The fact that the entire world has been placed in the same situation nobody can afford to turn a blind eye - there are multiple factors that come into play when considering the circumstance of another. And as we learn to resonate and listen, we can simultaneously grow closer to finding solutions and filling the spaces we unintentionally form with those we may not fully understand.
George Kalukusha is a singer/songwriter based in Lilongwe, Malawi. George is also the founder of Pa Khonde sessions. Pa Khonde is an artistic experience; it aims to connect audience to artist and produces audio visual content for online platforms and intimate concerts.

What has production been like for you during this Covid-19 period?
I think there are certain stages of producing a finished piece of work that have been easier, namely, recording because I have had so much time to record which pretty much requires me to have a finished song. The writing process however, hasn’t been as creative or as inspiring because of how everything is and how the situation and the surroundings are affecting me as a person and my mental health. Yeah, so I haven’t been as creative but I’ve had so much time to be in the studio. So, there are certain stages of actually producing a finished piece of work that have gotten easier and others that have gotten more difficult. For me, I was lucky in the sense that last year I was writing a lot of music that I wasn’t able to release. So, this year, and the end of last year, was just focused on recording that music. It was more a case of sourcing instrumentalists and other producers, and obviously with Covid it was a bit tough because some days we’d have our studios closed because someone had a scare so we’d be closed for a couple of weeks. We’re getting everyone in one at a time, so we didn’t want to have too many numbers in the studio. There has been barriers but at the same time there has been more hours for you to spend trying to record – I say trying because it hasn’t been the easiest part of the process.

You host/you run Pa Khonde Sessions. Do you want to tell us a bit more about that?
Basically, Pa Khonde came about when I was looking for cool places to perform in South Africa, Malawi, and SADC and I saw that in South Africa they had a cool night called Sofa Sessions/Sofa Sounds – which has been happening since I started music. They have a very popular YouTube channel which all the up-and-coming artists try to get on and they started up in London and now they are all over the world. So, when I found them in South Africa – I was like – I’d love something cool like this in Malawi as well because there are so many up and coming artists, there are so many artists that need to be heard in a space where people are actually listening and people are actually paying attention. Often times in Malawi, we perform for audiences that came for the drinks instead of entertainment. It’s not really a conducive space for sharing an artform. I pretty much decided to make a night where the premise would be simple, we would just be sharing. What’s more intimate than someone’s
The effects of COVID-19 on artists have been noticeably different now that there has been a shift towards remote work. Agencies that normally wouldn’t hire an artist based on where they live would reconsider doing this now because the location is not as important. This has been especially true in the animation industry, where it’s safer, has fewer regulations, and contains a smaller crew. This artist, who has made the decision to channel his work into animation because the pandemic has caused a surplus of positions that are available to a specialized animator. Although he says he benefits from this, it is also a huge hurdle to get passed, as the fear of not having work for artists, in comparison to other professions with multiple projects at once, is extremely present. The fear of not having work for artists, in particular, is extremely present— as the amount of pressure to deliver for art has increased. Performing his music remotely. When interviewing a young musician, he discussed why the pandemic has come as an unusual way to view the world. The natural state of these things has been channelled into animation because funding to continue their respective roles has been given, whether they have been grants provided for creatives or organizations have also been funded to support projects they have been working on individually or as small clusters to formalize their own sector of the art industry. It’s a lot of work because of no government intervention. I would love there to be a legitimization of the industry and to put a stump on it, that way the products that come out of the industry are monetized and are capital goods not social goods.

For me, in Malawi, and the Malawian creative industry, I would like there to be a recognition of the contribution that Malawian artists and the products of work make to the country—to promoting its beauty, to promoting its tourism. People come to Malawi because they see a picture that a photographer took and that’s a piece of artwork. They come to Malawi because they saw it in ‘So-and-So’s music video, there’s no recognition of that. In fact, they still deem the art industry as an informal sector and a lot of us have to work individually or in small clusters to formalize their own sector of the art industry. It’s a lot of work because of no government intervention. I would love there to be a legitimization of the industry and to put a stump on it, that way the products that come out of the industry are monetized and are capital goods not social goods.

The writing process however, hasn’t been as creative or as inspiring because of how everything is and how the situation and the surroundings are affecting me as a person and my mental health. Yeah, so I haven’t been as creative but I’ve had so much time to be in the studio. So, there are certain stages of actually producing a finished piece of work that have gotten easier and others that have gotten more difficult.

What would you like to see for artists in Malawi post-Covid-19?

It’s been a while since I’ve been to one. Obviously because of Covid-19 and the way we consume art now is different. There’s a different sort of feeling when you’re experiencing the art in person. Do you think that has made it harder to promote your EP?

Again, promoting is like a process and there are certain aspects of the process that have been easier and certain aspects that haven’t been easier. Because there is more time to spend, I can focus a lot more on digital marketing and trying to reach my audience through the internet but there are also lots of great physical platforms that have died down in their impact. It’s one of those things where you have to access the situation as it is, learn how to navigate, and still maintain a connection with the audience even though you don’t get to perform as often. One of the things I used to do before launching a project is to perform a lot and to strum up morale through physical performances and I haven’t been able to do that. Even just creating a big launch for this EP itself, I haven’t been able to do that. Now I am working on doing a very intimate thing with a small number of fans but normally it would have been much bigger than that, it would have generated much more noise because by promoting the show I would have been promoting the EP as well and that aspect of it hasn’t been so accessible. I feel like where there has been a loss there has also been a gain and that’s how the situation is.
Kelvin Before Gumbi (KBG) adapting to online media & making use of live streaming
I think Covid-19 has really put us in a fix because we were used to the same way of getting shows and getting paid – that’s the only way we get money here in Malawi, we don’t get a lot of money from CDs and what we produce as media. We get money from making shows and producing merchandise. Maybe stuff like promotions on social media and stuff like that. But the main source of income in Malawi is shows and merchandise.

Transcribed from audio interview with Kelvin Before Gumbi (KBG), 13 March 2021
Edited by Lerato Honde

Has Covid-19 affected the work you do as an artist? If so, how?
Covid-19 has really affected the way we do business as creatives, even how we create. Despite it being a bad experience for most of us as artists (I’ll speak from an artist’s point of view, then I will speak from a business point of view – as a creative also). From an artist’s point of view, I think Covid-19 has really put us in a fix because we were used to the same way of getting shows and getting paid – that’s the only way we get money here in Malawi, we don’t get a lot of money from CDs and what we produce as media. We get money from making shows and producing merchandise. Maybe stuff like promotions on social media and stuff like that. But the main source of income in Malawi is shows and merchandise. So looking at that, we don’t have a lot of shows going on... at least shows that can accommodate about 50 people and above. It still is a bad experience, talking about it money-wise, a lot of the artists that I know are not making money now and this is a crucial time in their career, trying to find ways of surviving, while we are in ‘lockdown’ or while we are not doing shows. I must say, for me, it made me think outside of the box, rather than worrying or complaining, or wishing Covid-19 would go and we could get back to normal. I have learnt in my life that we have to find solutions when we are faced with a problem. When Covid-19 came, I repositioned myself as an artist and a producer of content, and I realized that there was a gap, and this gap was the availability of platforms that can accommodate artists in the midst of Covid-19, in the midst of a lockdown. How can artists still produce or promote or perform while still at home? So that’s when I started to focus on creating these virtual platforms or offering services that can accommodate artists to still perform from the comfort of their own homes and reach a fanbase... and what this did is it opened up an opportunity for me to build a studio – it was there already but I expanded it to accommodate at least a 4 piece band so that people can come and perform live. Honestly, this renovation has proven to help because we have had big names coming through to perform – the likes of Gwamba, Young Kay, Third Eye, just to mention a few.

Please tell us about the competition you have been hosting for artists.
So basically, it’s not a competition but I guess we could call it that because it involves people sending in songs and we get to pick the ones we think are authentic and creative in terms of content, production and delivery. We are going to bring these people to the studio to perform these songs, either with a band, DJ, or a back track with vocals and what not. We are looking to do this because we believe this is the only way to discover artists who really need to be discovered. Sometimes, we are used to seeing artists because they know how to push themselves and they’ve got the platform. It was a chance for us to say – you know what, what about the artists who want to have a platform like this but don’t have access... and be able to push them – open up a platform, share their content on our social media, for them to be discovered. We have been overwhelmed, we had about 20+ submissions, we have been going through them even though the process has been slow. We want to now select and start announcing which ones have made it for the Nyailusik Discover Semi Finals, from then we will choose at least 3 or 4 and that’s it. In the process of choosing, we will invite prominent people in the creative industry – musicians, producers, to help us choose these artists who are authentic – those who stand out in terms of their creative process, their content and their delivery.

What do you think the importance of live streaming is during this time?
I think live streaming is important right now because it is the future, it is the thing that we really have to jump on as artists, it is something that is
not going to go away. Even if Covid-19 decides to leave tomorrow, live streaming is here to stay. This is the time when platforms that host virtual conferences have been making money. Netflix has been making money, and we see more platforms emerging in this digital work... so it’s clear that live streaming is here to stay. It is important to say that you don’t need a lot of money to do the show anymore, now with the introduction of live streaming... I mean it’s been there but now artists have to embrace it to reach out to their fan base... so you don’t necessarily need a lot of money for it. Back in the day we were looking at booking accommodation, booking camera men, major sound systems, big spaces that would cost you about a half a million kwacha – you know to get a decent place where you can do a professional show, here in Malawi. Right now, you can overlook that and focus on creating virtual shows until maybe a time will come when we can say – okay let’s go out again. But right now it is an advantage for up-and-coming artists to still do shows in the comfort of their homes. It has opened up a level ground for most of the artist we know to create thinking about how much money it will cost – yes, it will cost you some money but it’s different from doing traditional shows. There’s an opportunity here, for up-and-coming artists to do shows. I have seen a lot of artists doing shows – even on YouTube, they are doing shows in their living room, they are doing shows in their bedroom, back in the day this was unheard of. Now, we are in a space where content is being created with a phone, and you can literally do a show with your phone if you have the knowledge on how to do the streaming thing. I think it has given artists the opportunity to create with very low-cost equipment and that’s a big transition/leap/ even with helping us discover new artists because a lot of artists are coming up, and it’s helping us discover new talent in a blink of an eye. I think it’s important and if you are an artist, I urge you to jump on it! Do virtual shows if you can because this is where we are going.

I think Covid-19 has really put us in a fix because we were used to the same way of getting shows and getting paid - that’s the only way we get money here in Malawi, we don’t get a lot of money from CDs and what we produce as media. We get money from making shows and producing merchandise. Maybe stuff like promotions on social media and stuff like that. But the main source of income in Malawi is shows and merchandise.

Photo credits: Kelvin Before Gumbi (KBG), Nyalimusik Studios
Transcribed from Audio Interview with Penjani Munyenyebe
19 April, 2021
Edited by Lerato Honde

Please introduce yourself. What is your name and who are you?
My name is Penjani Munuyenyebe, a multidisciplinary artist practicing photography, cinematography and music.

Why are the arts important for our society?
Art is important for our society because it allows us to imagine and create the future. Art is an escape from everyday reality and acts as entertainment. Art creates jobs. Art and the process of creating it is integral to mental health. Art is essentially a record of people and to understand any culture and or period in time it is important to study their art.

Why are the arts important for our society during the Covid-19 pandemic?
The importance of art is even more prevalent during this pandemic considering the drastic changes we have all had to make. I find myself comforted by never changing timeless music and entertained by newold TV shows and documentaries. I owe them part of my sanity. Financially it has been difficult for everybody but I appreciate art even more because it has allowed me to employ myself when people are losing jobs.

Please walk us through your creative process
I marry my creative process with my lifestyle in general. When it comes to my photography and cinematography, I search for the things nearest to me that I can explore, people, places and everything in between. Honestly, my process is very subconscious now because I've been practicing for some time now. I figured to always be prepared for any opportunity related to my passions. I find inspiration to take photos from music and inspiration to do music from pictures and so forth. In general, I have no process that is formulated but I have enough skills to execute my imagination.

Has the pandemic had an effect on the work that you produce? If so, how?
Yes, the pandemic has had an effect on the work I produce especially in terms of locality. Due to the state of this pandemic and bans on international travel, my travel photography was hurt quite a bit. However, the pandemic has in my opinion forced a
You depict the lived experiences of people. How do you think the lives of your subjects have evolved since Covid-19 begun?

The lives of the people I depict have changed significantly since Covid began. Just like all of us have had to adapt to new normalities and customs. More specifically I’ve seen a slight increase in the number of street vendors around especially those selling masks. Some positivity has come out of this however it cannot overshadow the significant number of deaths and lives lost due to Covid and the trauma of not properly grieving for loved ones.

Do you feel safe when doing your job?
I feel fairly safe at my job because I can achieve a great deal of work from the comfort of my home or alone. However my job sometimes requires me to be in public and work around and with other people so some element of risk is present.

What are your hopes and dreams for the future of photography in Southern Africa post-covid?
More interregional collaboration and exchange, gallery shows and exhibits. I speak from my experience of living in Zambia, South Africa and Malawi when I say we have more similarities than differences that need to be tapped into. I have build relationships with the fellow photographers in Zambia and South Africa who continue to support and show the possibility of cultural exchange working.

Images (in sequence):
1. Lilongwe, Malawi, January 2021
2. Salima, Malawi, July 2020
3. Bagamoyo, Tanzania, December 2019
4. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, December 2019

all photographs taken by Penjani Munyenyebe
In a social climate where the rates of female school drop-outs are already high, the introduction of nationwide school closures due to COVID-19 is making it more difficult for girls to return to school. Girls that got married, pregnant, sexually exploited, and forced into child labor are often pressured into dropping out of school. Structures and policies should be put into place to ensure that they return to school and have equal access to education.
We ALL have a role to play in ensuring that girls return to a fair and inclusive learning environment.

**Chiefs**  To ensure that practices and beliefs that cause girls to drop out of school are abolished in the community.

**Teachers**  To facilitate a supportive learning environment where girls returning to school are not teased by their peers and their learning needs are met.

**Head Teachers**  To create structures within the school system that keep girls in school and to provide equity driven spaces, where girls who face domestic pressures can also excel at their studies.

**Mother Groups**  Women support groups positioned in every public school to ensure that girls from the school who get married and pregnant are able to return to school. To educate parents and children on the importance of education.

**Fellow Students**  To treat fellow students respectfully and with care so that the learning environment is one which is fair and inclusive psychologically and emotionally.

**District Education Officers**  To ensure that national government policies that provide support for girls are implemented at a district level.
Girl Learner Back to School Project in Malawi with Ukhondo Services

Transcribed from Girl Learner Back to School Project in Malawi, Episode 5, Numbers as Faces Podcast
25 March, 2021
Edited by Lerato Honde

Please introduce yourself. My name is Violet Mhune, I’m working with Ukhondo Services (USEF), and I am the project officer responsible for the Girl Learner Back to School project. I am an Environmental Scientist by profession. I personally felt that working with girls would be an opportunity for me to share my own experiences; for me to counsel, mentor young girls, help them become what they want to be in the future, especially from a young age.

Our main focus is sending girls back to school but we understand that that has a lot of things involved including taking them from marriages, taking them from child labor, counselling them from abuses of some sort or defilement, pregnancies, whatever’s kept them off school. What we’re doing is we’re assisting already existing structures—mother groups, school PTAs, head teachers, teachers; we’re helping them re-enroll girls in schools. We’re working with various stakeholders in the community as well such as Traditional Authorities, who have group village headmen under them, who also have village headmen under them. We are working them, ensuring that from a community perspective, they understand the importance of educating the girl child.

Did you face any challenges as a girl child going to school? My parents were very, very encouraging in my pursuit for education. However, there was a point in my secondary school education where I could sense that the school setup and the classroom setup encourages the boy child more. There’s been a shift over the past 10 years or so, but what I was in school the boy child was given more attention because their success was something that was expected, someone could already foresee the success of a boy child as compared to a girl child. Growing up, I didn’t think about it much but now that I’m older I definitely see the difference. I remember in my school, the top performing boys had a group, they used to call themselves the G6. They always met after classes until later on in the evening, just so they can study. By the day secondary school, everyone else would go home, but they used to stay. My best friend and I really wanted to be part of this group and they didn’t allow us. Already, that setup wasn’t encouraging for us girls because the boys would leave school at 8pm and in Malawi 8pm is quite late for girls to be out. There weren’t a lot of girls that were encouraged to be in school. In that year there were only two girls that made it to university, including myself. All the boys that were in the G6 went to university and a few others as well. I lost touch with so many of my female friends from secondary school. In Malawi there’s a huge gap between people who didn’t do any tertiary education and those who finished at secondary. It wasn’t easy for me or anyone to setup a group for girls to encourage each other.

What challenges do you face when sending girls back to school? We face several challenges when trying to send girls back to school, I’ll highlight a few. I have noticed that in Malawi, there are a lot of limitations in the implementation of our policies because everyone is looking at how best they can get something out of what is being done. Every time we have something going on with stakeholders, if they don’t see any potential personal benefit the turn up is low. We know that we can’t achieve much without involving the government, courts, and community leaders. There’s a lot of delegation to interns in different public departments. For example, if the Department of Social Welfare sends an intern, the Department of Youth

lot of delegation to interns in different public departments. For example, if the Department of Social Welfare sends an intern, the Department of Youth sends an intern, the Department of Health sends an intern, everyone sends an intern, the participation is there but the value of what we’re doing is limited. There isn’t much personal benefit with what we do so it’s difficult to get certain stakeholders on board. However, with this project—sending girl learners back to school, we’ve been able to interact with different stakeholders and they have been very active and present. But the main challenge has been dealing with people in top positions. They have the power to give penalties and punishments when implementing policies but they are the ones who don’t show up, they just receive reports. On this particular project, school closures have been a major issue for us and it has been limiting us because our main focus is getting girls back in school. When we just started working on the project, girl learners were out of school for 6 to 7 months and there was little hope because they weren’t being attended to. Most of them got married or got pregnant, but now that schools have reopened and things are opening up, a lot of girls are saying ‘Okay, I don’t have fees’, or ‘I don’t have a uniform’, ‘I don’t have notebooks’, ‘they need sanitary pads’, the school infrastructure is not very welcoming. It’s even worse when girls are going through puberty, because they give excuses such as ‘I had to stay out of school the entire week because I was menstruating’. These girls don’t have role models. That’s why the best person for these sorts of interventions is usually a woman. When you go to the typical rural areas, you will see that the girls have no access to civilization and their dreams go as far as being someone’s wife or owning land. There is a desperate need for role models in the communities; people working for NGO’s, women that are inspiring in their communities. I was told that there is a school in Mzimba, where the school does not even have a female teacher, as well as in Chilipa. So, you can imagine! The girls don’t see any inspiring role models at any level. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Disability in Malawi has different sectors, and under these different sectors, the ministry is making sure that there are female representatives. For example, at PTA’s, there must always be a female representative, Area Development Committees, Village Development Committees, school management committees, child protection committees, all these governing structures that are set up at community level should always have women representatives. It’s a great policy and it’s being implemented. However, the women in these spaces are not always educated. I guess it’s something that is a continuing cycle because the girl child is not getting educated. I’ve been thinking about it how we can bring mentorship into our programs when schools re-open. Every time we have activities in the schools, I will make sure I have females that come with us, who are just talking to the girls separately—especially the girls who have re-enrolled... just providing psychological support, giving them an opportunity to ask questions, and educating them on different career options.

“These girls don’t have role models. That’s why the best person for these sorts of interventions is usually a woman. When you go to the typical rural areas, you will see that the girls have no access to civilization and their dreams go as far as being someone’s wife or owning land”
What would you like to see happen as schools re-open?
As more schools open up, I would like to see better initiatives being taken by the schools. There's a gap in the mindset of how people view education and how we would like them to value education. There are all these roles that we place on school children... we say ‘get educated to be a nurse, or a doctor, or a pilot, roles which aren’t actually so prominent’. Whenever I am doing advocacy campaigns or awareness, I don’t mention these roles. I want people to understand that even as a housewife you have to be educated. I have been told by several women in mother groups (groups of women in each school who track down girls and send them back to school) that girls say to them, ‘Why should I go back to school? My parents are not educated, but they provide food, we have land and I will never struggle’ or ‘I will get married off to someone who is rich and therefore I do not need education’. I like to give this example to young women: when you are married and have a baby who is under 6, your baby will constantly need medication for different reasons. In those moments, you need education to say ‘this is the appropriate dosage’, ‘this is the illness’, you need education for daily life skills. I like to give this example so that young girls don’t just think ‘when I grow up, I want to be a nurse’, they should think ‘I need to get educated to make myself better’. Even to business someday – selling tomatoes, or to make basic financial transactions education is important. We have a long way to go but everyone’s input in this is important. There is a difference between the way I think and the way a mother of 11 children who is not educated thinks and how they live their day-to-day life. Even outside of formal education, it’s not just up to the girls and their parents, how do community members treat girls? I don’t think there should constantly be an issue of rape. This has been happening a lot in Malawi recently, there are rape cases all over the place... and those are the only cases that are being publicized. We only get to hear when someone has been sentenced, but there are several more which are still in court or the culprits ran away and authorities never heard about it. We need general civic education, so that people in the community understand that offences such as rape are wrong and rapists will get penalized when caught. It’s important for all of us to take part in educating our nation, so that general life skills are taught.

“‘We need general civic education so that people in the community understand the fact that offences such as rape are wrong and rapists will get penalized when caught. It’s important for all of us to take part in educating our nation, so that general life skills are taught’”

Are girls who returned to school getting discouraged because of the school closures?
Yeah definitely! I don’t have the facts but even just from observation, I have a cousin in Form 4 (the final year of Secondary School in Malawi) who was meant to be done with school in 2020. After Covid hit, they didn’t know when they would write exams. They eventually wrote the exams in October and the exams got leaked, so they were postponed for the second time to 2021. Her class had been in Form 4 since 2019 which meant that they would be in the same class for 2 years. I remember someone took a video of my cousin screaming, yelling that ‘I’m done with school! I don’t want to do this anymore’. For her, you wouldn’t think that she would be considering dropping out because her father has a masters degree and her mother is a teacher. So, you’d think that she’s not being realistic, but that tells you that someone is actually thinking about it. I’ve heard of a couple more kids, who’ve said ‘You know what, I just want to write the exams and get over it’. Imagine what it’s like for someone in a typical Malawian village setting who has no one to encourage them and they have struggled through their entire education because of poverty.

There’s a particular school in Chitipa that had Standard 8 exams (final year of primary school). During the Covid-19 break, the school lost all the females in that class... so essentially the Standard 8 class had no females writing exams. I don’t know how many people the class had, but even if the class had only 5 girls, that’s still a 100% dropout rate of the females. I’m really interested to know more about this school. Even if all of the girls got pregnant, they should be allowed to go back to school and write the exam.

“There’s a particular school in Chitipa that had Standard 8 exams (final year of primary school). During the Covid-19 break, the school lost all the females in that class... so essentially the Standard 8 class had no females in that class”
Let's keep girls in school

1. Equity vs. Equality

2. Education is important for basic life skills

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“Things will get heavier and heavier for them”

the devastating consequences of Covid-19: School closures in Lesotho

Fifteen-year-old Mamello Rasiloane carries firewood near her family’s home in Ha Ramabele in Matsieng, Lesotho
PHOTO CREDIT: Thabo Mohloboli for The Hub

‘Lesotho shall endeavour to make education available to all...’ – Constitution of Lesotho

Mid-March 2021
By Leila Hall and Moleboheng Rampou

This is the third year in a row that 15-year-old Mamello Rasiloane’s education has been interrupted. In 2019, schools in Lesotho were closed for months due to teachers’ strikes. In 2020, schools closed for the majority of the year because of Covid-19. Now, in 2021, schools are gradually reopening, but many students from poor families are unable to return because of their families’ worsening financial instability – a result of the economic impact of Covid-19. Although primary school is free in Lesotho, secondary school is not, and many families struggle to find the necessary funds to pay for school fees, uniforms, and learning materials.

‘I last went to school in March 2020,’ Rasiloane tells us, shaking her head. ‘In 2020 schools were closed for a long time! In 2019, the teachers would strike and we would close, then we would go to school, then they would strike again and we would close. We weren’t getting proper education then, but in 2020 we didn’t get education at all!’

Mamello Rasiloane cooks outside her family’s home in Ha Ramabele in Matsieng, Lesotho.
PHOTO CREDIT: Meri Hyöky for The Hub
Rasilane uses hand gestures to indicate the back and forth of schools opening and closing. She has a bubbly, expressive personality and throughout our interview breaks into smiles or laughter. Dressed in an orange sweater and torn jeans, she takes us around her family’s modest household in the village of Ha Ramabele in Matsieng, Lesotho. She lives with her two grandmothers, her older brother, and her younger sister. Her mother – like many migrant labourers – lost her domestic worker job in South Africa last year because of lockdowns and border closures, and is now struggling to find part-time work in Maseru.

‘Many people like my mother lost their jobs last year and things changed in our homes,’ she recalls. ‘It was a hard year, with so many changes that we were not used to. My school opened this month but I haven’t been able to go yet, because my old uniform doesn’t fit me anymore. I’m waiting for my mother to have enough money to buy me a new one, then I can start going to school again.’

Can I ask a question?’ she says, wringing her hands, with a sudden worried expression on her face. ‘I would really like to know how the government intends on helping out some of us who are still at home, who can’t afford to go to school because of so many problems.

Ten-year-old Mosa Ntepelle is also worried about her imminent return to school. Because of the lost academic year in 2020, Lesotho’s Ministry of Education has indicated that all students will automatically be promoted to the next class. Ntepelle should have completed Grade 4 last year, but was unable to because of the school closures. Regardless, she will be starting Grade 5 this year when her school opens next month.

‘How will I keep up in Grade 5 when I don’t know anything from Grade 4?’ she wonders. ‘I think skipping a class like this will make Grade 5 difficult, and I don’t want to suffer. I would rather repeat Grade 4, then next year move on to Grade 5.’
Mosa Ntepelle has struggled to keep up with her schoolwork alone at home.

Both of Ntepelle’s parents have died, and she now lives with her uncle and grandmother. None of the adults in the household work, and the family lives off her grandmother’s pension and subsistence farming. When we ask if she has managed to keep up with any school work over the past year, she shrugs.

‘We weren’t given any school work to do while we were closed, so it was only up to me to keep studying,’ she says. ‘I had to help with chores in the mornings, and then I would try and sit down to study. My grandmother would sometimes help me, and sometimes I would study with some friends.’

Fourteen-year-old Kananelo Nako has also struggled to keep up. He is cooking split peas over an open fire when we talk to him. Throughout our interview he continues to work, looking up at us occasionally through the wood smoke to answer our questions. He explains that he spends his days helping around the house or in the fields, and that he often has to herd his grandfather’s livestock. His grandmother passed away last year, and in the midst of the activity around her funeral his school books disappeared.

‘I have no idea where they are,’ he says. ‘We didn’t get any work from school at all for the whole year that we were closed; we never got anything.’
Even before Covid-19, the majority of young people in Lesotho faced grim educational prospects. A 2018 survey indicated that less than half of Basotho children aged 7 to 14 had foundational reading skills, and even fewer had foundational numeracy skills. Only 1 in 10 children from poor, rural households were likely to complete secondary school. Last year, Lesotho-based experts from UNICEF and WHO warned that the 2020 school closures could lead to a national education crisis, and urged for the importance of finding ways to help students to continue to learn remotely, and to open schools safely as soon as possible.

Despite these calls, however, most students from poor, rural households found that they received no educational support – and doubt continues to surround whether schools will be able to open safely this year, with all the necessary Covid-19 measures in place to protect teachers and students.

Nako is also unsure of when exactly his school will re-open. Once it does, he thinks it may be forced to close again due to Covid-19, and he worries about the long-term impact of these lost years on his education and his future.

‘I’m afraid of not being able to get a job when I’m older,’ he says with a frown. ‘I’ll just be there at home, struggling, maybe even unable to read and write.’
‘Makamohelo Masiloane – an unemployed mother of three – tells us that she has been struggling to help her eight-year-old daughter to keep learning.

‘The government really did not think through how closing schools would affect us,’ she says. ‘During that period they hardly came up with plans to help. We didn’t receive any material or assistance. When schools first closed, my daughter was still interested in her books, and I would try to help her. But as time went by, she lost interest and focused less and less. Whatever I said or tried, she wouldn’t listen to me.’

When we ask about the possibility of Online learning and resources, Masiloane shakes her head and tells us simply: ‘I don’t have those modern phones that go onto the Internet.’

Last year’s school closures also interrupted the government’s national school feeding program. Masiloane reflects on the impact of this on young learners and their families.

‘They used to get one meal a day at school,’ she explains. ‘When schools were open, they would come home and eat whatever I had managed to put together that day, but I would know they had also eaten at school. When you don’t work, and you’re all at home, sometimes you have nothing to feed them.’

‘Her whole class was promoted to the next grade,’ she says with a frown. ‘I think there will be problems for some children. They will just keep being pushed forward, without knowing or understanding anything. As they go up a grade, just like that, they will find it more difficult to catch up with others; things will get heavier and heavier for them.’

Masiloane is not alone in her fears. Covid-19 outbreaks have already been recorded in several schools since the beginning of the year, and a teachers’ union recently urged the government to outline a clearer and more comprehensive Covid-19 prevention plan for schools.

Now, with her daughter set to return to school next month, Masiloane feels anxious about the fact that her daughter will be skipping a grade, and is unsure if her school is equipped to protect learners from Covid-19 infection.

‘I also keep wondering if there will be enough safety at these schools. Maybe in high schools the students will understand when you tell them to social distance, but not with these young ones. When lunch or break time comes they will be playing together, holding hands, and so on. Also in many of our schools the classes are tightly packed. I do wonder, as a parent, how their safety is going to be maintained.’
‘Mabafokeng Maino, a teacher at St. Louis Primary School in Matsieng, says that the staff and parents at her school have taken it upon themselves to ensure that Covid-19 safety measures are in place, with little support from the government.

‘We’ve built tippy taps!’ she tells us. ‘We called parents and we built them together. As teachers, we’ve come up with a new timetable to ensure that the students take breaks at different times, to allow for social distancing. We’ve also spoken to parents to make sure that the students all have masks. The government gave us a small package of masks, but there aren’t enough for every child, and they didn’t give us sanitisers or anything else.’

Maino also wishes that the government would have done more to support continued learning for students last year. She rolls her eyes when we mention Online learning.

‘We keep hearing about ‘Online learning’, but that is impossible for most. Some of our students come from really remote villages, deep in the mountains. Their parents can’t afford to have cell phones, let alone Smartphones. Last year I really thought the government would help us teachers by coming up with a plan to distribute written material to students. Something to make children still feel attached to their school work. But they didn’t.’

Looking ahead, Maino’s bigger concerns are now related to the long-term impacts of the school closures on her students. She tells us that many students will likely not be returning at all. For those who do, she worries about how to cope – as a teacher – with helping them to readjust to school life and to make up for lost time.

‘I wonder deeply what kind of pupils we are going to have, who have not been in school for this long? Some are going to refuse to actually go to school. One of the biggest problems is that some are now married or pregnant, and this means that their future has now been cut.’

‘How exactly are we as teachers going to work? These children did not go to school at all last year, and the year before that they were home very often because of the strikes. Now a child who has not completed Grade 1 is taken to Grade 2 this year. How does the teacher straddle and bridge that gap, going just a little bit into Grade 1, while trying to move forward into Grade 2?’
‘Mabafokeng Maino, a teacher at St. Louis Primary School in Matsieng, worries about the myriad challenges that teachers in Lesotho will face as schools around the country steadily re-open. PHOTO CREDIT: Meri Hyöky for The Hub

“The other thing is that this child has been home for so long, where they had all the freedom in the world to do anything they wanted. When we open, I imagine we will spend the first few weeks just dealing with discipline, and even with counseling, as many come from families where they have been living with fights and even abuse over the past year. This Covid-19 situation really affected people mentally. There were so many petty squabbles in communities. We are going to be dealing with all of these challenges this year.”
How long have you been a sex worker?
“It’s now 12 years”.

What made you become a sex worker?
“I was once married but my husband was very abusive so I left him. I moved in with my sister before I ventured into sex work. I was inspired by some girls in the neighbourhood who were sex workers and looked like they were earning a good living from it”.

How was your first night out?
“I went out with some friends and I was picked up first. I was really scared but the other girls encouraged me. I never looked back from that moment on. Later, I moved out of my sister’s house to stay on my own”.

What has changed since you started?
“Well! There is no money anymore. When I began this trade, money from customers wasn’t hard to come by. That was the year of the diamond rush in Chiyadzwa, Marange and it was easier then to cash in US$20 per night. Sometimes even more but US$20 was the average”.
What is the situation like now?
“Nowadays, you can go for 3 days without a single dime. Customers have been affected by the Covid-19 national lockdown put into place by our government plus the industry is now infested with younger girls. We now have to compete with 15-year-olds and customers prefer them over older girls. These young girls are offered more money to have unsafe sex”.

What challenges are you facing now as a sex worker?
“Customers are unavailable and the few that are there, are complaining about not making enough money. I usually charge US$5 for a short-time service but I am now forced to accept as little as US$1 for the same service. I have regular customers who at times bail me out of debt, especially when I fail to raise enough money for rent but now they’re also complaining of being victims of the Covid-19 lockdown. Where I usually asked for US$10, I now get as little as US$2. Some customers abuse girls and ditch them without paying. This has brought worry amongst sex workers as we fear for our safety”.

Where do you practice your trade?
“Night clubs, beer halls, and bottle stores are good spots to find customers but since the lockdown, these have been closed.”

How hard is it to trade during this Covid-19 pandemic?
“The other night I was caught by soldiers around 6.20 pm and was charged for breaking the 6 pm to 6 am curfew”.

Have you ever experienced any form of abuse from the security forces?
“Normally the soldiers/police ask for a bribe instead of sexual favours. If you don’t have enough money, they will arrest you for loitering”.

Do you get a receipt when you pay?
“If you’re paying a bribe, no receipt is issued”.

How much float do you carry each night you go out?
“US$5 is the minimum that the soldiers/police demand from each one of us. If you offer less, they will put you in chains”.

What happens when you get caught during curfew hours?
“When I pay my bribe money the first time, I can work freely for the whole night although you’re not guaranteed of getting a paying customer”.

How are your fellow colleagues handling things?
“Some have shifted locations, choosing to trade locally but I can’t do local because I am not comfortable practicing sex work near home. I like sticking to familiar places where I know my way around”.

What kind of help would you like to receive from the Zimbabwean government?
“I have heard of a certificate of trade although I am not comfortable going public about my business. We’re really suffering and all we ask is for nightclubs, beer halls, and bottle stores to reopen. If only the curfew times can be revised to 9 pm - 6 am for us to trade a bit”.

What about guest lodges?
“They are open but people don’t normally go there without the influence of alcohol. We prefer a drunkard as they’re more liberal with money than a sober person”.

What happens at the nightclubs?
“Normally customers drive by to get girls but since the curfew, they risk getting
arrested and their car keys confiscated by the police”.

**Are you not afraid of contracting Covid-19?**

“Even if I become afraid, as a mother of 3 girls, I still have to put food on the table plus before the 5th of each month my landlord expects US$50 rent from me, so I have no choice but to keep working”.

**What measures do you take to prevent the spread of Covid-19?**

“We do wear face masks and most of our customers carry a hand sanitizer with them. As soon as you get into their car, he sanitizes your hands. During the act though, we remove the masks”.

**Amongst yourselves, has anyone contracted Covid-19?**

“None that I am aware of. Most girls actually doubt the very existence of the Covid-19 virus. The girls most vulnerable are those that work around Forbes border with Mozambique. There are many truck drivers in transit from different countries like Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)”.

**Is there more money at the borders?**

“Yes, it’s one of the few places that are still vibrant although recently some girls were caught and charged ZW$50 000 (US$50). If they fail to pay, they face imprisonment”.

**What about other health risks?**

“There is a clinic in Sakubva that has been set up for sex workers by an unknown donor, where we get free treatment and medication for Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD). Without this clinic, we would have died years ago since we can’t afford the cost of health care”.

**Is this clinic open to the public?**

“It’s open to sex workers only and a lot of young sex workers get help from it after contracting STDs as most of them lack experience in practicing safe sex”.

**How can the clinic tell that you’re a sex worker?**

“There are specific questions that one is asked. At the clinic we get free testing, free treatment, and free medication”.

**Have you considered doing sex work during the day instead of the night?**

“I have a teenage daughter and I don’t want her to see my practice plus most of my customers work during the day. We all know that sex work has always been a night activity”.

**How are your colleagues coping with the government-imposed curfew?**

“We are not making any money. One girl was evicted from her home after failing to pay rent for 3 months. She has since relocated to her rural areas. I have managed to survive because I get financial assistance from my sister who is in Cape Town, South Africa”.

**How are you raising your teenage daughter?**

“I am pushing for my daughter to go to ‘A’ Levels or college. I don’t want her to go into sex work like me”.

**Why do you think many young girls are getting into sex work?**

“The closure of schools has caused boredom amongst young adults leading them into rebellious behaviours. These young girls think that sex work is easy money. However, being in school helps the youth stay occupied and focused on their education”.

**What are your thoughts on people dying from Covid-19?**

“I have lost some very regular customers due to Covid-19 and this virus is posing a serious threat to our survival as sex workers”.

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**HUMAN RIGHTS**

**#NumbersAsFaces**
Thank you so much for your time. Covid-19 has brought about so many challenges in our deaf community. Firstly, the communication gap. People with deafness fail to communicate properly as their mouths are covered with masks. Lip reading is an essential part of sign language and wearing a mask makes it difficult. It’s difficult to get assistance in public places such as shops and banks because people who do not know sign language, know no other way to communicate with us but to lip read. Sometimes hearing people are quick to pull down their masks in our presence, which can be helpful from a communication perspective, but risky when it comes to the virus. A lot of the information about the virus is not included in sign language and this makes it difficult for deaf people to follow the situation and adhere to preventative measures. For example, which helpline am I supposed to contact if I am showing symptoms?

Mobile networks have been awarding free talking minutes to their customers in return for frequent usage. What about deaf people? What am I supposed to do with those minutes? I am however, grateful for the way the media is progressing on television. During presidential addresses there are usually sign language interpreters which makes it easier to follow. People with deafness already have limited job opportunities. I know lots of people in the deaf community who are shop owners. They are living in fear and are failing to make ends meet in their businesses which makes it harder for them to provide for their families. Another issue I am faced with is communicating with colleagues during meetings. Most of my colleagues are now working from home as offices are closed. It’s great to see the digital world progressing in the form of Online meetings through platforms such as Zoom... but it’s difficult for a person with deafness to use such platforms.
23 April 2021

The Centre of Human Rights at the University of Pretoria shares their insights and research findings on the Human Rights Concerns for Persons with Disability in Southern African collected through a global Disability Rights Monitoring Survey which they conducted in 2020 in an effort to understand how the global pandemic has affected those members within our society who live with different disabilities and impairments. The below piece is written by Auma MI Dinymoi who is a Doctoral candidate at the Centre for Human Rights, Faculty of Law as well as a researcher under the Disability Rights Unit of the Centre.

By Auma MI Dinymoi

By the late months of the year 2019, emerging from the Eastern part of the globe, a storm had begun to brew -stealthily, but steadily. By March 2020, the raging clouds were grey, heavy and looming, with an imminent threat of a global pandemic. The world drew its curtains, bolted its locks, turned off the lights and went to sleep, as we awaited the passing of the storm. In what seemed like an alternate dimension, there were persons who did not go to sleep. Choosing to stay up, they pensively watched the broken bolts on their doors and tattered curtains on their windows. Within their means, these persons with disabilities had readied themselves, yet they could not there was something they or someone else -maybe the governments- could have done different.

The Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria in conjunction with other global disability partners launched -in a timely manner, a global Disability Rights Monitoring Survey at the beginning of the Covid-19 Pandemic. Among others, this survey was motivated by the real fear that the indiscriminate application of emergency measures by governments would aggravate an already grim situation for persons with disabilities characterised by limited access to social and economic services, health services, equal education, among others. Although the survey was approached with a global outlook, the overwhelming responses received from over ten Southern African Countries led by South Africa and followed by

Zimbabwe and Zambia revealed that there was a real and tangible impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on persons with disabilities in Southern Africa. It was evident that when -in response to the pandemic- governments across Southern Africa imposed lockdowns and other emergency restrictions, they omitted deliberate measures for the inclusion and accommodation of PWDs. The survey found that access to basic services and supports by persons with disabilities had been greatly affected with the largest number of respondents concurring that access to personal assistance, informal supports, interpretation services, food and basic supplies, as well as medication and protective equipment had been specifically hampered as a result of government measures to curb the spread of Covid-19. General access to health services for persons with disabilities was negatively impacted by the pandemic. In Zimbabwe, the already ailing health infrastructure was unable to cater to the needs of PWDs with over fifty percent of the respondents indicating that they did not have access to general and specialised medical care during the lockdown. Specifically, a few persons with disabilities reported that they had been denied specialised access to Covid-19 treatment. Perhaps owing to the inaccessible information on Covid-19 as will be discussed, most persons with disabilities in Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe expressed doubt as to whether they had equal right of access to Covid-19 medication. The government restriction of movement was thus implemented by barring access to health care services. Access to information on Covid-19 for persons with disabilities was also reported to have been hampered, with the majority of respondents stating that the information availed to them was not comprehensive. Rather, it was limited in

Photo by Meri Hyöky for The Hub
Zimbabwe and Zambia revealed that there was a real and tangible impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on persons with disabilities in Southern Africa. It was evident that when -in response to the pandemic- governments across Southern Africa imposed lockdowns and other emergency restrictions, they omitted deliberate measures for the inclusion and accommodation of PWDs.

The survey found that access to basic services and supports by persons with disabilities had been greatly affected with the largest number of respondents concurring that access to personal assistance, informal supports, interpretation services, food and basic supplies, as well as medication and protective equipment had been specifically hampered as a result of government measures to curb the spread of Covid-19. General access to health services for persons with disabilities was negatively impacted by the pandemic. In Zimbabwe, the already ailing health infrastructure was unable to cater to the needs of PWDs with over fifty percent of the respondents indicating that they did not have access to general and specialised medical care during the lockdown.

Specifically, a few persons with disabilities reported that they had been denied specialised access to Covid-19 treatment. Perhaps owing to the inaccessible information on Covid-19 as will be discussed, most persons with disabilities in Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe expressed doubt as to whether they had equal right of access to Covid-19 medication. The government restriction of movement was thus implemented by barring access to health care services.

Access to information on Covid-19 for persons with disabilities was also reported to have been hampered, with the majority of respondents stating that the information availed to them was not comprehensive. Rather, it was limited in some respects and importantly, not enough for them to prevent the spread of Covid-19 to themselves. There are several specialised formats through which information can be availed for persons with disabilities with respect to their different abilities, such as easy language, plain language, interpretation, sign language, audio formats, and multiple languages. However, except for South Africa, these specialised formats were not adopted by Southern African governments. In most Southern African states, information was provided in sign language targeting deaf and hard of hearing persons. However, persons with disabilities in South Africa were sceptical of the quality of sign language interpretation. The public and private dispensation of information therefore left out several persons with disabilities such as persons with intellectual disabilities, persons with downs syndrome, persons on the autism spectrum as well as those with cross disabilities.

Because of the indisputable evidence of a disproportionate burden of the pandemic on persons with disabilities, some governments adopted social protection measures to support persons with disabilities. These measures included carrying out their needs assessments, increasing the disability benefits, providing benefits where none existed before, providing financial assistance to carers and family, extending the identification and registration of persons with disabilities, among others. However, these measures were only adopted in some states. In other states the measures adopted were not significant to help persons with disabilities cope with the effects of the pandemic.

The above are general examples of instances where the human rights of persons with disabilities were impacted by the pandemic. From the foregoing, one would be excused to lose sight of the more
dire consequences that the pandemic visited upon the more vulnerable groups of persons with disabilities. Yet, children, women, older persons, homeless persons, as well as those in the rural setting faced the above challenges with an even greater, more specialised intensity owing to the intersectionality of their vulnerabilities. The right to education of children with disabilities came to a standstill because the alternatives offered were neither inclusive nor available for all the learners whose needs warranted special attention. The measures adopted by governments to protect the life, health and safety of these people largely ignored their heightened vulnerability.

To fulfil the obligations under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by which most of the Southern African governments are bound, it is imperative that governments cast away the indifference in their approach and ensure guaranteed access to health services and support for PWDs during the continued fight against Covid-19. This includes rehabilitation, medication and equipment, therapies, or development interventions and physiotherapy sessions in hospitals. For a collective effort towards curbing the spread of Covid-19, the government must commit to make all Covid-19 information more accessible to persons with disabilities through the consistent employment of not only sign language interpreters, but also other disability friendly communication formats.

It is rather unfortunate that persons with disabilities were generally not inclusively and intentionally sheltered from the storm that was the Covid-19 Pandemic by their governments. However, it was merely symbolic of a system that was bursting at the seams with exclusion, discrimination, and at times, indifference. It signified, above all, a pressing need for inclusion of persons with disabilities in policy making and implementation during –and after– the Covid-19 pandemic.
“This sickness is killing us in so many different ways”: Elders in rural Lesotho reflect on the impacts of Covid-19

Mid-March 2021
By Leila Hall and Moleboheng Rampou

‘My cousin’s son and his wife got the virus last year,’ recounts 68-year-old ‘Malepekola Moshe, who lives in the remote village of Ha Ramabele in Matsieng, Lesotho.

‘I got a call from the wife saying that her husband is coughing badly. She said he was so hot he felt like a heater, and he was having a hard time breathing. He was sweating so much that it was like he had taken a bath. He’s a taxi owner in Maseru, so he must have got it while transporting people. And then the wife got sick too. This was something we were all experiencing for the first time, so it scared us very much. But they went to the hospital and eventually they recovered.’

Moshe tells us this story as she feeds her chickens and tends to her vegetable garden. Despite the myriad challenges of the past year, she is energetic, animated, and happy to talk to us.

‘Malepekola Moshe in her vegetable garden.
PHOTO CREDIT: Meri Hyöky for The Hub

‘Malepekola Moshe feeds her chickens.
PHOTO CREDIT: Meri Hyöky for The Hub

Sun rise over the village of Ha Ramabele, Matsieng, Lesotho.
PHOTO CREDIT: Thabo Mohloboli for The Hub
‘You see this garden?’ she says, pointing to her rows of tomatoes and leafy greens (moroho). ‘That’s how I live! Off the garden and the fields. We just finished eating all the fruits, and I bottled some of them. My husband sometimes buys cooking oil, but when there isn’t any, I still eat moroho cooked with just water and salt.’

As is the case for many in rural Lesotho, Moshe and her family rely heavily on subsistence farming. This reliance has increased over the past year, however, due to the dire economic impact of Covid-19 and its associated lockdowns.

‘There are 12 of us in our household,’ Moshe explains. ‘Myself, my husband, our children, and our grandchildren. With the lockdowns last year, I lost my job, and my children had to come home because they too lost their jobs. We found ourselves living in such poverty. I used to think that if corona ever arrived in our house, it would take us all out, quickly. We had nothing to eat, we had no essentials. Usually, if I am out of work, then my children can help out. But this time around we were all just at home.’

In addition to the loss of livelihoods and income, Moshe reflects on the impact of Covid-19 on the fabric of her community. She claps her hands together for emphasis and exclaims: ‘This thing has changed the way we live!’

‘Before, we used to visit each other with no problem. Now, when we started distancing and staying at home, it was understood as if you don’t like people, or as if you think you’re better. I had to start telling people not to come to my house without their masks on, and that caused a lot of drama!’

‘We used to all help each other. If someone didn’t have something, like soap, you would give it to them. But with this corona, we found ourselves looking out for our own families only. If you didn’t have something, you felt you couldn’t go to somebody else to ask. As a community, we stopped helping each other out like before.’
Mapheello Mots’eleli gathers bundles of dried grass to make traditional brooms.

PHOTO CREDIT: Meri Hyöky for The Hub

In a different household in the same village, 69-year-old ‘Mapheello Mots’eleli sits in front of her home, carefully gathering bundles of dried grass, which she stitches together with thick red thread to make traditional brooms.

“These are my source of income,” she tells us, “but it’s hard to make a living from them. The profit is not that much. Sometimes people take them and pay late. Sometimes we have to spend the money on other things, and then there is no money to buy more material. What does that mean? More hunger.”

Mots’eleli shrugs her shoulders and sighs. Unlike Moshe, she does not personally know anyone who has tested positive for Covid-19. She speaks of ‘many deaths’ in the village last year, but she cannot be sure if any of these were a result of the virus. For her, the most tangible and immediate forms of suffering that Covid-19 has brought are hunger and deepening poverty.

“We have all been so hungry,” she says, shaking her head. “There are times one finds oneself even craving simple papa [maize meal]. In this village and others, some people got donations, like food packages, but we have not been given anything. We are here, hungry still. I wish those people in the government would come into the villages and see the heartbreak that is our lives. This sickness is killing us in so many different ways.”
Mokuena Senekane tends to his sheep. With crime in the village on the rise, he is increasingly worried about the threat of stock theft.

PHOTO CREDIT: Meri Hyöky for The Hub

67-year-old Mokuena Senekane is similarly worried about the impact of lockdowns and school closures on young people in the village. We stand at the edge of the fence around his property and he points to a pond in the distance, where a group of boys are carrying a fish between them. Senekane explains that often takes his sheep out towards the pond, and has to repeatedly admonish children for playing there.

‘Children have been drowning in such ponds in other villages,’ he says. ‘It’s a huge problem. Parents are busy and they don’t even realise that their children are down by the water. They play and fish there all day because they have so much time on their hands, and nothing constructive to fill it with. Now that schools are opening, some are downright refusing to go back. They have grown used to spending their time fishing, or hunting for small animals in the forest. And how can we stop them, when they are successful in their hunts, and when there is no food at home?’

Motsèleli is raising her grandchildren, all of whom are currently out of school. Despite the fact that schools in Lesotho are steadily re-opening, she does not have the money to send them back, and worries about their future.

Everything shut down when this thing [Covid-19] came,’ she says. ‘Our children lost their jobs, their children could not continue with their studies, and chaos started. In this household none of the children are going to school because there is no money, and things are getting worse. They need the education, but I doubt they will be able to go.’

‘Mapheello Motsèleli stitches traditional brooms, with her grandson seated beside her.
PHOTO CREDIT: Meri Hyöky for The Hub

Mokuena Senekane takes care of his chickens and vegetable garden. Like many in his village and in rural settings across Lesotho, he provides for his family’s needs through subsistence farming.
PHOTO CREDIT: Meri Hyöky for The Hub
Senekane also reflects on the recent rise in crime in the village. He tells us that many small businesses in the community, including his own, have been broken into over the past year. He does not express any anger over this fact, however, but rather shows his sympathy and understanding. ‘Hunger!’ he exclaims, raising a finger in the air to make his point. ‘Yes, these young people are criminals, but they are hungry and they have no other means. Covid halted so many people’s lives; so many people lost their jobs. The virus brought so many changes that we never thought we would encounter in our lifetime. Last year was difficult, but I think this year might still be another difficult year.’
How different is the South African variant from the Chinese variant?
“It’s still the same Covid-19 but with slightly more and different symptoms from the Chinese variant. The South African variant may display unusual malaria-like symptoms but it’s still Covid-19”.

Can you tell us about the symptoms of Covid-19?
“Most common symptoms include coughing, chest pains, backache, headache, fever and chills, stomach ache, diarrhea, and body weakness”.

As a nurse, what is your assessment of the situation on the ground?
“Presently things are better than the last one and a half months. The period after the 2020 Christmas holiday was the most frightening and January 2021 was the worst as we had 4 to 5 deaths per day at our provincial hospital but now we can go for 2 to 3 days without a single death. During the holidays people became ignorant attending functions with no masks and no social distancing. I have also noticed that most of the people who are succumbing to Covid-19 have underlying illnesses which makes them more vulnerable to infection”.

We have heard of doctors dying from Covid-19. How true is that?
“I don’t have that kind of information and at our hospital, no doctor has succumbed to Covid-19 yet”.

Do you have enough Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) at the hospital?
“We have enough equipment, especially in the wards where Covid-19 patients are treated”.

Is there enough manpower to run the hospital?
“We need more personnel although the government is really trying to correct this”.

Why is there a shortage of nurses?
“Most nurses are leaving for more paying jobs in foreign countries like Canada, United Kingdom, and the United Arab Emirates”.

HEALTH SYSTEMS IN ZIMBABWE: A nurse’s perspective

Early-February 2021
Edited by Runyararo Nyagwande
Tell me about your working hours?
“We are working 5 days a week as the law requires us to work 40 hours per week”.

What measures can people take to protect themselves from Covid-19?
“People should wash their hands frequently and cough into their elbow”.

Do masks work?
“Masks do help to stop the spread of Covid-19”.

Is there enough medication in hospitals?
“Yes, everything is available”.

What is your encouragement to anyone displaying Covid-19 symptoms?
“Once one feels the Covid-19 symptoms, they should go to the clinic and get tested. If the symptoms are not severe, one can get health education from the nurses which they can use at home. Without awareness, one can just live ignorantly and spread the virus”.

Do you think natural herbs work?
“I have heard that Muzumbani (Lemon bush) works although it has not been clinically proven yet. However people are testifying that it does help”.

It is said that the Zimbabwean government is procuring a vaccine. How true is it?
“We are hearing that as well, just like everybody else but no formal communication has been made to us yet”.

There are those that are claiming that the vaccine is dangerous. What are your views?
“If it’s a real vaccine, it will be good for us. It’s the same as the Tuberculosis (TB) vaccine being administered to children. However, after receiving a vaccine, it doesn’t make you immune to the virus but it does help boost your immune system”.

How long does it take for a person to recover from a Covid-19 infection?
“In 10 days, the symptoms should have cleared and the risk of transmission would be very low”.

After recovering from Covid-19, do you become immune from reinfection?
“Covid-19 is reinfecting and the chances of contracting Covid-19 again are still high”.

Is it true that Covid-19 affects the elderly more than anyone else?
“The immune system of the elderly and those with chronic illnesses are generally low making them more vulnerable to Covid-19 infections”.

What advice would you give to people in terms of their lifestyles?
“People should eat healthy, especially our African traditional foods. Avoid eating fatty foods and to exercise regularly”.

Being a front-line worker, are you not affected by people dying so rapidly?
“We are the most traumatized as we witness people whom we would have nursed die so suddenly. It’s even more scary when you start feeling the same symptoms as well”.

Are you not afraid of bringing the virus back into your home?
“I fear for my family getting an infection from me but I have to work. Each time I come home, I go straight to shower, soak my uniform, bath and wear fresh clothes”.

Any last words?
“Covid-19 is real and it does not discriminate. I encourage people to adhere to government regulations so that we can defeat this virus”.

Illustration by Amy-Leigh Braaf
15 March 2021

By Amy-Leigh Braaf

The psychological strain front-line workers have endured throughout history is closely linked to their environment. This can include economical and social factors, however, in the case of a pandemic as large as COVID-19, multiple external factors come into play. When the virus initially hit - hospitals had an influx of patients both in public and private institutions. After interviewing multiple front-line workers in Southern Africa there seemed to be a consensus that all front-line workers were shifted from the spaces that they had been working in. When understanding the psychological effects of being quickly moved from one stressful environment to an even bigger one, considering the immense pressure they are under already daily - many found themselves being overwhelmed and spread too far. Space is an interesting concept when understanding the human condition and how they respond to unpredictable circumstances. The idea of “space” is often attached to balance, and a sense of mindfulness. When space and routine are disrupted often a sense of disarray may follow. Not only are front-line workers placed in extremely vulnerable positions where they are at high risk of contracting the virus but they are also at risk of infecting other patients, if precautions are not followed.

The emotional guilt that is attached to being responsible for another human life is something that all humans encounter at some point - as our actions may have a direct link to the effect that it has on other people. When resources are low, social support is non-existent and when no space for decompression is given people can often feel isolated, fearful, and extremely stressed to the point of burning out.

Psychological support is a factor often overlooked by those who are expected to give. Front-line workers are often met with frustration from patients, are overwhelmed due to an overload of work, and also have their personal lives to live. The fact that many front-line workers are facing death everyday and watching patients suffer also takes a huge toll on them. There needs to be a space for understanding their emotional state and the capacity that they can fill to deal with daily stress. Based on financial security that different hospitals all over Africa have - also dictates how they are run. With more organization - front-line workers can rest, as well as decompress their new schedules. As they have an influx of patients coming in every day they have to adapt to dealing with this.

Often when we go to medical workers for any help there is a sense of urgency - ambiguity can lead to anxiety.
Public hospitals are struggling to receive all of their patients and tend to them well because it is not guaranteed that every person will have medical aid. On the other hand, medical workers put themselves at risk daily and do not always have access to the medical equipment that they need. The cost of COVID-19 tests varies but can be very expensive for people with low incomes or who are unemployed. Front-line workers’ family members also suffer as they can live in fear for their loved ones who face the pandemic head-on every day. Burnout can shortly follow an unpredictable global problem such as this pandemic - and although medical practitioners are trained to expect unplanned scenarios - they are not trained to deal with a pandemic nor a virus that can constantly create different strains.

Family members of front-line workers are very much at a high risk. When medical practitioners return home from long shifts their children, partners, and older family members are put at risk every day. Without knowing the extent that this pandemic will go on for (especially with new waves on the arise) there seems to be more fear instilled in the minds of both front-line workers and their family members. The shortage of resources for patients also means that supportive resources for front-line workers are limited. Food packs/lunch packs, may be provided in some hospitals but not always - and alternative accommodation to keep their own family members protected is also not always financially viable.

As children go back to school - they still remain potential carriers even if they do not show symptoms. If we imagine the spread of the pandemic by using imagery of dominoes we can trace the impact that it has forming a full circle. If a front-line worker has contracted COVID-19 and then go home to their family they might put one of their children at risk. If their child does contract the virus but does not show symptoms and attends the school next day, multiple children can become carriers as well and teachers are put at a high risk as well. With limited classroom space children cannot properly socially distance and in order for the teacher to monitor them constantly, to see if they remove their masks and properly sanitize - it also affects the process of teaching without distractions. And so a full circle begins - as more people could potentially contract their virus from their children they then go to the hospital and once again pose a risk to healthcare workers.

Scoping for medical workers beyond the ones available at hand can include asking medical students to help out in hospitals ahead of time and also asking retired medical practitioners to help share the work. Receiving help from the government by receiving PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) and from medical grants and donors help alleviate the stress that is placed on front-line workers but the funds have to be monitored and used where they will be most effective. Donating protective equipment for medical workers help ensure that they can do their job whilst protecting themselves and their own family members. The lack of the correct infrastructure and tools to handle a pandemic such as this is one are the core reasons why healthcare workers are placed in such a stressful environment and suffer psychologically with the COVID-19 cases coming in.

As we navigate the social spaces we are placed in - even within isolation it is vital to consider the social space that front-line workers are in on a daily basis. The relief of being able to go home after a long day of work is not often a reality for healthcare workers as the fear they carry within hospitals without enough physical and psychological protection may come home with them. Spacial awareness is essential in empathising and bringing aid to those who fight to stop the spread of COVID-19 and they should be given all the support they need during this unpredictable and isolating time.
The psychological strain front-line workers have endured throughout history is closely linked to their environment. This can include economical and social factors, however, in the case of a pandemic as large as COVID-19, multiple external factors come into play. When the virus initially hit - hospitals had an influx of patients both in public and private institutions. After interviewing multiple front-line workers in Southern Africa there seemed to be a consensus that all front-line workers were shifted from the spaces that they had been working in. When understanding the psychological effects of being quickly moved from one stressful environment to an even bigger one, considering the immense pressure they are under already daily - many found themselves being overwhelmed and spread too far. Space is an interesting concept when understanding the human condition and how they respond to unpredictable circumstances. The idea of “space” is often attached to balance, and a sense of mindfulness. When space and routine are disrupted often a sense of disarray may follow. Not only are front-line workers placed in extremely vulnerable positions where they are at high risk of contracting the virus but they are also at risk of infecting other patients, if precautions are not followed. The emotional guilt that is attached to being responsible for another human life is something that all humans encounter at some point - as our actions may have a direct link to the effect that it has on other people. When resources are low, social support is non-existent and when no space for decompression is given people can often feel isolated, fearful, and extremely stressed to the point of burning out.

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**Lerato Honde** is a visual artist and a junior architect. Through her work she seeks to address issues pertaining to identity, empowerment, and self-worth. Her work encompasses a wide range of media including animation, paint, design, writing, and sculpting. Lerato is the co-founder of an arts Collective called Wona Collective which seeks to shed light on the lived experiences of Malawians, with a special emphasis on women and marginalized groups.

**Ingrid Bame** is a South African Content Producer and Media Enthusiast, with a passion for storytelling and creating spaces within our society that are inclusive to marginalised groups within Africa. Ingrid is an activist in her own right and vocal on matters relating to inclusivity of those who are often othered in societies, like persons with disabilities. Ingrid leverages public forms and media platforms to unpack said barriers and exploring solutions towards an equal society.

**Amy-Leigh Braaf** is an illustrator, UX designer and photographer with a B.A specialising in Film Production. She runs an Online magazine and has lived in South Korea for two years and has travelled to multiple countries in East Asia photographing her experiences. She has exhibitions and is currently working on a poetry graphic book which aims to reach womxn all over the world to discuss and explore topics that affect them on a daily basis.

**Runyararo Nyagwande** is an evolving Zimbabwean Graphic Designer with a keen eye for detail. He aims to merge everyday life experiences with new concepts that motivate others to action. His inspiration is drawn from Photography, Art and Design. Through Irenic Geny, Runyararo creates inspirational, compelling and thought provoking visuals that bring a new and fresh perspective to the African story.
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The only initiative of its kind in Lesotho, The Hub (thehubatmorija.co.ls) is a creative technology lab that seeks to take a creative, collaborative and participatory approach to raising awareness and seeking solutions to social issues with digital arts for change. The Hub's primary target is young people between the ages of 8-30. Through its various activities, The Hub aims to foster a community of young people in Lesotho who are skilled, inspired, motivated and socially conscious.

Patricia Dimhairo is a committed advocate for gender justice and women's rights. She is currently a Programme Support Officer at OSISA.

Tshiamo J. Phybi Ditabo is a creative interested in advertising and communications management. She works in the OSISA Communications Unit.

Levi Kabwato is the Communications Manager at OSISA.
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