

You strike a woman, you strike a rock (Part 2)

 By [Philippa Clayre](#)

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This is a continuation of Philippa Clayre's article where she interviewed three young black South African women on what Ma Sisulu's legacy means to the younger generation today.

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[You strike a woman, you strike a rock \(Part 1\)](#)

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Marginalisation of impoverished women

Nwabisa states this isn't a task anyone can manage on their own. "It's important for me to unite with other amazing women, and for us to collectively create platforms that empower those who can't empower themselves," she says. "I may not be able to change policies (yet)" she adds, "but I can pick up the phone and call friends; I can reply to messages from women who ask for help on our Pap Culture platform; and collectively we can help ease the frustrations in the system that let women down. It's easy to think things will never change, but as Maya Angelou once said "If you don't like something change it. If you can't change it, change your attitude." Working together, you can help prepare a path for greater things to happen."

For Tylor, who is making her way in the corporate world without the usual requirements of a university degree, she would love to be a part of a generation of women hell-bent on being the very best version of themselves, each and every day. "We are beginning to see a generation of women who are free from any kind of stereotype placed on them by society - a generation who value their own thoughts, goals and morals. If we have a generation of female leaders educating people like this, we will shift the antiquated paradigms of what a woman can and should be. Without it, all women will remain marginalized to some degree or other, not just women of a lesser income bracket."

Bongeka agrees that education is definitely one of the keys to success, but says it works hand in hand with opportunity. "In South Africa, we have the weird situation where we have neither a surplus of jobs nor affordable quality education" she explains. "Solving the one won't necessarily make the difference we would want to see in the other. If I had a golden wand, I'd make education free, with specific benefits attached to entrepreneurship courses, as well as easily accessible and free incubators to help female entrepreneurs."

Can tech equality help with gender equality?

"Tech certainly has a role to play in helping with gender equality," says Bongeka whose work with Mirum sees her at the cutting-edge of possibilities through technology from cloud-based platforms to AI strategies.



Bongeka Masango, digital account manager at Mirum

“ The advancements made in technology, as well as more women working in leadership positions in tech companies, help change the story so that now we are in a space where solutions that empower young girls earlier with equal access to

tech, are assisting in closing the gender inequality gap. ”

Taylor points to the use of technology and social media supporting women finding their voice and creating platforms that empower each other. “70% of people who enrol in online courses are women (OECD “Empowering women in the digital age” March 2018). This increased fluency in digital together with advancements in technology is creating a new source for opportunities that weren’t possible previously, such as the sharing economy. Additionally, women sharing their experiences and views with others helps improve the learning curve – at least at the outset – which in itself is a continuing motivator.”

Nwabisa feels that whilst technology can definitely fast track solutions as well as the wider conversations, there is still much more that needs to be challenged which even technology can’t help with, such as access, a task she acknowledges is easier said than done. She says,

“ *The issues around gender equality are far-reaching. Technology is certainly one tool in a range of solutions, but when there are women on the continent who still don’t have access to it, reaching a state of equality becomes a lot more challenging, as these women will be confined to one-dimensional roles in society.* ”

What does Ma Sisulu’s legacy mean to young nationals?

Taylor expresses one of the major impacts Ma Sisulu’s legacy has had is on the freedom of choice for women that she - and other strong female leaders fought so hard to achieve. “I am a copywriter today not simply because I fought hard for what I want in life but because others before me like Ma Sisulu fought for justice and gender equality,” says Taylor. “She ensured that women’s talent, hard work and effort would not go unnoticed merely because we were female. And that is a priceless gift she has handed down from her generation to the next. Let’s hope it doesn’t have to be handed down a generation further but will actually become ingrained in our societal values and way of life.”

For Bongeka, the legacy is equally personal and one she hopes to fulfil in her own lifetime.

“ *I admire people who dedicate their lives to services as much as the Ma Sisulu’s of the world do. It is inspiring seeing people finding their purpose and pouring their all into something. That kind of dedication is like a rock, immovable and never fails to create an impact. I hope to find my purpose in the same way, and live my life with the same dedication so as to make a positive change in the world around me.* ”



Nwabisa considers Ma Sisulu’s legacy to be bigger and broader than Ma Sisulu ever imagined. “It’s the work of women like Ma Sisulu, and the thousands of women who weren’t as high profile as she was, that have shaped who I am today. And it is our responsibility as women of this generation to carry on that work. To bring more women together, so that we all continue to lay down a path of progression and development for all, not just women, but for the generations that come after us,” she says.

“I too want to see a world where it isn’t headline news that X becomes the first woman to do something” continues Nwabisa, adding “Women killing it should become the norm, not the exception. I’m seeing so many more young women not waiting to be told what to do, but grabbing the bull by the horns, redefining the rules of engagement, and setting new examples of what it means to be young, black and excellent. We are enough and pretty soon the rest of the world will catch on to our power” she concludes.

Sixty-two years ago they signed a petition; sixty-two years ago they marched on Pretoria and sixty-two years ago the rock that is a woman’s strength struck out on the streets of South Africa. That momentous day has generated ripples of change

for over six decades at a macro and micro level. The new generation of dynamic South African women aren't resting on the laurels of those who came before them.

They are finding ways to provoke conversations; dial-up personal commitments; and root achievements in paths that enable those who follow to have an easier journey. "Wathint' Abafazi Wathint' Imbokokodo" - when you strike a woman, you strike a rock, and you better believe those rocks are paving highways over preconceived notions of what a woman can or will achieve, to represent the very best South Africa has to offer.

ABOUT PHILIPPA CLAYRE

Philippa re-joined JWT in 2011 as Head of Corporate Communications for the agency's Middle East and Africa region. Her role involves narrating JWT MEA's diverse range of stories to both internal and external stakeholders, finding innovative ways for the brand's vision, mission and purpose to come alive.

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