

Celebrating Everyday Namibian Heroes



Photo: File

Dr Helena Ndume

This 'miracle doctor' has stolen many Namibians' hearts. She has also been recognised internationally for the work she does. Dr Helena Ndume was the first awardee of the United Nations Nelson Mandela Prize alongside Jorge Fernando Branco Sampaio of Portugal in June 2015. Introduced to Surgical Eye Expeditions International (SEE International), she set about starting the eye camps project in Namibia in August 1997.

She currently travels across the country several times a year to restore sight to underprivileged Namibians with the help of the government and funding from NGOs.

"My biggest motivation for what I do is the satisfaction I get when people see again. When my patients can see their grandchildren again and start being productive members of their societies again," she says.

As for what keeps her going every day, health, fitness and wellness are a priority. "I make sure to eat healthy. I wake up at 04h30, exercise and do my mountain climbing. My beautiful family also motivate me a lot."



Photo: Contributed

James Itana

James Itana is the national co-ordinator of the Namibian chapter of MenEngage. A global alliance of over 600 organisations that work collaboratively to engage and work with men and boys in efforts to promote gender equality and to address socio-development challenges such as gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health, teen pregnancy and HIV/AIDS.

Responding to Namibia's high incidences of GBV, teen pregnancy, alcoholism and the prevalence of female-headed households as a result of absent fathers, James is hard at work in the creation of a society where men and boys are actively involved in changing and challenging the harmful gender norms and stereotypes that perpetuate this damaging status quo.

With his mother as his greatest influence and a product of a household in which men and women were seen as equal, James believes efforts to work with men and boys need to improve and be laced with far less stigma.

"The belief that change is possible is what motivates me a great deal," says James. "I believe that Namibia has an opportunity to be the best country in Africa. I believe that as Namibians we can be role models. We have a great opportunity and potential to change. All it requires is for men and women to change. The inequalities that women face are an injustice to us all."

For more information about MenEngage, visit menengage.org.

- Netumbo Ngekomba, Martha Mukaiwa and Rukee Kaakunga

A walk though Heroes Acre just outside Windhoek will envelop you in the presence of the spirit of some of Namibia's iconic struggle heroes. Many others lay in other resting places, be it at Okahandja, Omugulugwombashe or many other graves across the country – both marked and unmarked.

Our history boasts of revolutionary heroes who played their part in freeing us from the oppression of foreign forces, but today a new breed of heroes and heroines are making Namibia a great nation.

Here are a few modern day heroes and heroines who are doing great things in their communities.



Photo: Contributed

Shaanika Nashilongo

The Monica Gender Violence Solution (MGVS) organisation started after Shaanika Nashilongo witnessed violence within his home and the community around him. He has also been victim of abuse and had to deal with a traumatic experience after his mother was abused by his father. However, he decided to be the change and start MGVS, which assists the youth in terms of counselling and assisting them in cases of gender-based violence.

At 23, Shaanika has already been assisted by First Lady Monica Geingos, and continues to spread positivity throughout his community by organising talks, gathering volunteers and raising funds through concerts to help more families.

"I am motivated by the street life, the way people are living, how they are suffering and the problems they are going through," Shaanika said, "and I want to change their lifestyle for the better, especially single mothers".

In terms of what he plans to do next, Shaanika says that he wants to be a great example to others, not just to himself. "I will make sure that every step of my leadership makes history. I believe in new changes and the changes I make will inspire people to be heroes." All he wants to be, he says, is a forefather of this generation.



Photo: Contributed

Samuel Kapepo

It's all about the children with 30-year-old Samuel Kapepo. Coming to Windhoek in the early 2000s, Samuel, who grew up as an orphan, wanted to get friends together and change the lives of children who didn't have a place to go or have any family to support them. Understanding the struggling way of life where selling empty bottles on the street was a lifestyle, Samuel overcame his situation and felt that he had to give back to those in the same boat.

Eventually, he started up the Kids Soup Kitchen in Katutura with the help of some friends and now the organisation regularly makes meals for children living on the street.

Through his work, he has brought international volunteers and was elected to represent Namibia in the Oxfam International Youth Partnership – an initiative to promote change.

"I am motivated by the simple things in life," Samuel said. "It could be the young women who wake up every day to go sell at the market, the men who stand up to go sell kapana... I am motivated by people who are true to themselves and people who think less for themselves and more for other people. Street vendors inspire me and people who don't even have salaries."



Photo: Facebook

Christina Fonseca

This fearless woman in uniform is a true defender of the peace that our forefathers fought for. While she has had to overcome battles in life that included having to drop out of school in Grade 9, Christina has risen above her humble beginnings to become one of the country's favourite police officers.

She rose to fame for her proactive take on community policing and her no-nonsense stance on dubious churches, targeting pastors that she believes are misleading the public.

"I love my job. Working hand-in-hand with my community members to prevent crime and do community social problem-solving and orientation motivates me a lot, and I always want to do the best at it," says Christina.

She says that her past experiences have made her who she is today. "Never cheat, never be corrupt, success may come late but surely you should always put your duties and your country first" is a quote she lives by, something that founding president Sam Nujoma (who is like a father figure to her) always says to her.

"I think that if you work hard enough, you can achieve anything," she added.