

Sibo Ncube: I think climate change chose me. I recall my early years as a little girl, hiding behind the couches just to eavesdrop on my parents and grandparents sharing news of what was happening in our rural home in Nkayi. How there was drought and how the farmers got nothing and the stories of how families were getting very very hungry.

Meghan Mast: *That was Dr. Sibonokuhle Ncube talking about the impacts of climate change she's seen in her home village in Zimbabwe.*

Today on the show, we're talking about climate change. But this isn't a conversation about all that is broken and what to fear.

Sibo acknowledges the challenges we face, but focuses on imagining and working towards a better future. So, get comfortable. You're going to want to listen to this one.

I'm Meghan Mast and you're listening to "Relief, development and podcast," a production of Mennonite Central Committee.

(MUSIC FADES UP AND THEN DOWN)

Sibonokuhle Ncube is a social justice advocate and practitioner.

She has over 18 years of experience working on humanitarian relief, sustainable livelihoods and peacebuilding projects.

She worked for an MCC partner in Zimbabwe and has spoken on MCC learning tours.

She is currently a theology and peace studies student at the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Indiana and several months ago, producer Christy Kauffman visited and recorded her.

Here's Sibonokuhle from that visit.

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Sibo Ncube: Year after year I'd hear these stories, and watch my parents send food, send money discuss about how to send more help. And I wondered why my people in the rural areas wherever hungry, one thing I knew about them was that they worked really hard. On good years, and within good seasons would sometimes get very, very good harvest and so just the news of that they were hungry sounded so wrong.

As a woman working amongst people of faith, it became important for me to be able to articulate God's kind of peace and God's kind of economy, so that I not only acquire the language, but also the tactics and the faithfulness of reconnecting all humans together with God, as a very egalitarian and generous benefactor, for God's creation. And it's given me what I call "Godfidence." "Godfidence" to go out and re-live and re-express God's gospel as a gospel for all creation.

Working with climate change, because we're in the Anthropocene, where science shows us, demonstrably, that humans are behind the massive changes in weather systems, and that we are responsible for the ongoing ecocide has meant that I study the connections between humans, the environment and God. And for me, this has meant that coming from an embodied witness of the suffering of my people, particularly in the semi-arid regions of Africa and arid regions of Africa, that I look at the drivers of the shifting climate. And coming to the global north has tended to help me develop

a parlance that's beyond blaming but inviting everybody to the courtyard. In Africa, we don't necessarily sit at tables. The business of the village is often under a tree or in some space that is akin to a courtyard. And so, I have grown to challenge myself to invite as many people to the courtyard so that as a generation together, we can think about how we are generationally and intergenerationally responsible.

Modernity, as we know it, has been driven by fossil fuels. And we are beneficiaries of this civilization. And so, we are then generationally drawn to rethink and reimagine a cleaner future, where we revise the ways in which we have thought that development processes that alter, that reduce poverty, reduce unemployment, reduce inequalities, ought to occur in certain ways and which they will never do. Because our carbon influenza is part of that matrix, that will never happen. And so, as a generation, we need to figure out a way how we can live forward together.

And also, the changing climate is existential. And it's time that age old barriers of race of class of ageism, and sexism, were relegated to our past, as we come together and envision what we are leaving or will leave behind for posterity. There's a lot of climate anxiety, that's ongoing. And I dream of a time when those in power and leaders in power do not have to wait, for the wailing of children, the Greta Thunbergs of our age, to remember that they are leaders and bear responsibility for bequeathing a future to generations to come. By helping us who live today to be more responsible about our resources, about the way we consume, the way we produce and the way we deal with what we are throwing away.

I think as individuals and as members of communities, we are a part of broader ecologies.

There are many things that we could do if we can just be mindful and look around in our environment to see where we can connect. I think an individualistic point of view and reference arc has tended in our age, to work against creative imagination of what we can do about this. We are in such an existential tipping point, such that we cannot afford to freeze because of the size of the problem. For some people because of distance, it can be hard to see the impact of the shifting climate and how to really connect with why we're making a hullabaloo about this. But the truth is, I come from the margins where I have seen areas suffer droughts year after year, and then have the rain fall all in a week. And then there are floods, and then the people's lands are flooded, and there is no food. And yet, it is not their choice. And when it comes to drivers, we know that excessive greenhouse gases are behind the major shifting in weather systems. We can see that it's the larger economies of the world that are in the conceptual global north that are essentially behind the drivers of the shifting climate. And so, it would make sense that we all re-look at ourselves and consider where it is that we can be impactful in the small to big ways.

I have noticed that women and girls, as primary caregivers have tended to experience more suffering, because of the disproportionate burden of care that rests on their shoulders, because they're responsible for going to fetch water, for cooking, for cleansing, for foraging.

And when the land doesn't readily bring forth it then means the struggle is greater and the danger whilst looking for food, water and energy increases. And so human security has their studies to show how human security decreases when food, water and energy, when that deficit increases. So, the struggle to heal the land to heal the agency of women and girls in particular becomes very strong to deal with as an urgent matter.

At the margins, the rubber hits the tarmac, and the commons where cattle graze where sheep and goats graze or are herded, become spaces and sites for conflict and contention. The resources that nature gives that are often coping foods, like the mopane worm in southern Africa, become a source of contention and struggle. And this is a worst-case scenario that you would, that is experienced in many rural outbacks. And because of that, it's become very important to co-labour with communities to imagine or experience a re-humanization and re-dignification process, where communities can see who the enemy is. And no matter the gifts from the commons, have communities work together and share what's available, and think of virtuous ways of encouraging regeneration in spite of the problem before them. And I find that a climate response is a peacebuilding response, because the shifting climate creates haves and have nots. And God's Shalom is such that our relationships are right. And therefore, we need as many people coming alive and being conscious to the importance of building peace and making peace in this context of the shifting climate, and the trouble that is experienced within communities because of that.

I have strongly contended and do preach that Jesus communities embody the virtuous ways of sharing the virtuous ways of living intentionally and conscientiously on the land, healing the land, healing relationships, and sharing what's available, because that's the currency of the love of God. And therefore, my faith has become inextricable from the work that I do in that my faith drives the work that I do. And the work that I do is the work principally, of peacemaking. And because of the complexity in various contexts, I then have been working through multiple themes, to co-create and dream with communities, helping communities dream of a future where we can overcome lack and its impact on our relationships, and the land.

I have sought to espouse the idea of the beauty of being human together, and the beauty of dignified relationships that honour parents, take care of the most vulnerable and take care of the land as a wonderful space in our dreams that we ought to reach out for. And the expected outcomes is for people to begin to see themselves, not through the lens of lack, or the few resources available to the community, but through the lens of what can happen when everybody can access together.

Because I have grown to understand that the land has a very, very strong voice. And sometimes we have degraded the land and thought because it's under our feet it has no voice. And so, my gospel also brings the land to the centre and gives the land a voice. When the land fails or the weather fails, the land mourns, the land weeps. The land is not happy when it is flooded. And so, giving agency to the land, which is not a concept foreign to my people, but bringing the voice of the land within the theology of the gospel as it has been preached, has tended to shape the, reshape the dynamics of how people also interact over the land, interact when there are conflicts over the land, or over livestock that interact over say fences or fenceless places in common spaces or titled spaces.

So, the land needs to go back to Indigenous hands. The land needs to be restored to its keepers. And my current relationship with the land is that I also speak for the land. Once in a while, I lay on the ground, now also lay on the floor. And I listen to the land, and I listen to the floor. And that's the symbolic way of me restating my connection with the land and the ground. To say, I know one day as Jesus tells, I too will become part of the land. And to some mysterious sense, in some mysterious sense, my body and the land, past any meal I could eat during the day, are connected in future in as much as the land got a part of me when I was born. So, I attempt to move with an awareness or live with an awareness of the importance of the land, in my life and in the lives of my daughters. I think of the land as a healthy side of

regeneration and restoration, even as we do in human relationships, so must we in part of the virtuous ways that we are seeking human relationships. So must we practice the same over the land.

I think about my daughters a lot and it's in recent years that young people have actually been able to voice that they experience climate anxiety. And that it has been named that way. But the first time I heard about it was actually from my daughters. And I feel that this has been one of the gifts to say, in my children, I hear the future speaking today. And these girls have tended to be like a prophetic expression, inspiring me to share as much knowledge as I have today, but also humbly receiving the way their perspectives on the world as a shaper of my voice as a current leader. I know that as the circle of life continues, I will one day perhaps be cared for by them. And I want that space to be a mutual space of joy. Where I don't regret that when I could, I was able to teach. And when I could I was able to receive so that they're more stronger than I was when I had perhaps seemingly more agency than they to bring change.

All of us have a responsibility. And the Jesus community would best lead from the front than become an echo. Because that means it's too late. The Jesus community is a community that has been well able to decipher the times and what should be done as part of responsible and compassionate action. And creation care is one of those themes that the Jesus community must feel passionate about. We can enact and embody our passion differently, but certainly, we should be firm taking some action. It could be in our teaching, but certainly our lives should testify of that we are aware of the connections and the meaning of the age that we live in now. Yeah.

Meghan: *Convicting words from Sibonokuhle Ncube, a veteran social justice advocate, practitioner and visionary.*

That's it for this episode.

Next month we'll hear an update on MCC's response in Ukraine.

If you like this podcast, consider subscribing. You can also rate it and tell your friends to give us a listen.

This episode of Relief, Development and Podcast was recorded and produced on Treaty 1 territory, the original land of the Anishinaabeg, Cree and Dakota peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation.

This episode was produced and hosted by me, Meghan Mast. Our guest was recorded by producer Christy Kauffman. The head producer is Emily Loewen.

A lot is happening in the world right now. This is a difficult time for many. May you experience God's provision and protection as we work together to share God's love and compassion for all in the name of Christ.

Thanks, take good care.

(MUSIC FADES UP AND THEN DOWN)