

African Youth Day 2013

'What Can I Do?' by Judyannet Muchiri



What do you do when you are in a bus for 10 hours and you are travelling at night so it is not possible to just hug your window and enjoy the view? Okay, I was in such a situation recently and sat next to a young man from The Congo and soon we started talking. Our talk soon narrowed down to Africa; to our specific countries. I told him about Kenya - the people, the government, the youth, the economic activities, the education system and as expected the political situation. When it was his turn, I asked him a lot of questions about his country and he explained in depth the situation in his country and the challenges therein. Then, I asked him what *he* has done (was doing) to address these challenges and he looked at me and asked me **'What can I do?'**

Today, the 1st of November, is the African Youth Day and the world sets apart this day to celebrate the young people in Africa from South Africa to Tunisia, from Niger to Tanzania, basically everywhere in Africa. During this day we laud the efforts of the youth, we engage in discussions of matters affecting the youth and we challenge the youth to shatter the self-made limits. We also highlight projects that have been spearheaded by the youth; startups in health, technology, agriculture, education and other spheres of the society. It is, in simple terms, a day for any young person who is African.

At the risk of being labeled a proponent of the 'Half Empty Glass' class of thought, we must move beyond this and squarely analyze the place of the young in Africa. Why does a young man from Congo ask what *he* can do to address the problems in his country? That is the question I am asking myself today as an African youth. Why do we still ask what we can do when we have



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everything we need to take action? Why do we still look at what we do *not* have rather than what we have?

As long as we do not sleep hungry, as long as we have a place to stay and as long as we have clothes and degree papers then we are satisfied to go about life in a passive mode. We exist but only within ourselves, beyond that we do not bother. We do not know what is happening within the government, we do not know what opportunities are there for the youth, we simply do not know anything and we do not want to know.

This, I believe, is the problem with Africa today. We, the youth, have not owned up. We have not claimed our Africa for ourselves. We are happy to let others make decisions for us, enact policies for us and therefore orchestrate our destiny. When Africa calls we render a deaf ear and when the drum beats call us into action we cover our ears with our hands to block the call and then go on Facebook and Twitter and talk about 'this and that'

We, the youths of this generation, owe it to our forefathers who had to face insurmountable challenges to give us the present day Africa as we know it and to the sons and daughters of tomorrow who might look back to us and God-forbid ask 'What can I do?' As such we must take Africa and actively engage with it; become equal citizens in the equation who can be treated as such by those who precede us.

As long as the African youth do not own Africa as their own then we are looking at more young men and women in buses, in universities, in the streets asking 'What can I do?' Of course I explained to the young man from Congo what he could do and gave him examples from my own experiences in Kenya but what I really wanted to tell him is -

'You can stop being African!'

"I am an African Crusader who believes that Africa is an equal player in the global village discourse and should be treated as such. A changemaker who champions community development projects and uses new media, words and pictures to effect change in community."

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