

# THE HEAD THAT TURNS

Jacqueline Fanta Mudiria (South Sudan)



It is the morning of the first day of January 2063. Zamba was woken up by the ruffling noise of two cockerels fighting just outside her window. She was too lazy to get out of bed and her mind wasn't clear yet as she picked up her phone to check her messages on WhatsApp. A nagging yawn overpowered her and she let it go, ending with one loud groan. Her mother making breakfast next door heard her and immediately burst into a loud laughter.

"You better drag those young bones of yours out of bed young lady. It's 2063 and here you are still stuck between the sheets like a magnet. Come over and give me a hand," her mother said.

The relationship between mother and daughter was the envy of all relatives and friends. People took to calling them sisters.

"So, what do you want me to do?" she asked.

"Well, for starters, set the table for breakfast?"

As she went to the cabinet, her mother started humming a song she had never heard her sing before. It had something to do with life in the 20th century. Curious to know more, she asked her mother to tell her some inspirational story from that era.

"Around the late 20th century," her mother started, "in a large African country called Nudas, was a beautiful, brave intelligent and hardworking young girl named Hipaingba. She lived with her extended family who included her mother, aunties, six younger siblings, grandparents and first cousins. Her mother was an

extremely hardworking woman who raised Hipaingba with her siblings single-handedly because her father was deceased.

“Hipaingba’s mother cultivated land and the produce was used for home consumption. The surplus would be sold and the money was usually saved for only essential things and school fees. Hipaingba and her siblings every day after school would help their mother either by selling the produce in the market or by farming in the garden. Even though they did not have much, they were surrounded with so much love. Hipaingba worked tremendously hard in school and at home with the hope of one day making a change in her family’s life.

“Unfortunately, Nudas, where Hipaingba and her family lived was experiencing many conflicts that was tearing it apart and making life quite unsafe for them. Hipaingba and her family therefore decided to flee to the neighbouring country of Carep with the hope of a peaceful and safe place to stay. While in Carep as refugees, life for Hipaingba and her family got even harder. Hipaingba had to wake up early in the morning to fetch water from the well before getting ready and starting the long trek to school. Though she was a bright child, she had little or no hope of continuing her secondary education, under these conditions. But she kept on, nevertheless. “Little did she know that the United Nations was promoting girl-child education through what was called Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal number 4. Hipaingba was lucky to win a scholarship under this effort. She had hope of continuing her education as she knew that it was the only hope that she had for her family and herself.”

“Why are you telling me this mother?” asked Zamba.

“Because there are lessons for you here, my daughter that I want you to take as you enter 2063,” she responded.

“You see,” mother went on, “Hipaingba got pregnant and for a moment her world came crushing down. As you would expect, her family was disappointed in her and she too was disappointed in herself because it suddenly hit her that her future may never be the same. However, as it turns out, this experience only made Hipaingba more determined to continue with her education and succeed in life. She was lucky to have a family that continued to support her materially and morally.

“Hipaingba named her daughter Mboriundo, meaning God helps. Amidst all the odds, Hipaingba completed her education and was the first of seven siblings to graduate with a university degree. She secured a job that allowed her to live comfortably, support her family and even sponsor nearly all her siblings to school. Two of her siblings reaching up to the university level and helping her to support the family.”

Zamba’s mother paused for a moment, seemingly overcome with emotion at this girl’s determination and the thought that negative things that happen in life should not deter one from succeeding.

“Are you okay mother?” asked Zamba, now almost forgetting her breakfast.

Mother continued as if she had not been interrupted, “Hipaingba’s daughter Mboriundo became an international student living in Canada, but was so moved by her mother’s experience that she vowed to prioritise education above everything she did. She even set herself a goal of contributing to the development of Africa by empowering other young persons to stay in school because she believed that education was the way to a bright future.

“I am telling you this because 50 years ago, African leaders came up with a document that by this year 2063, all of Africa’s children would live decent lives, without harassment and with decent livelihoods. The United Nations also came up with the 2030 Agenda that was meant to achieve the same objectives. I want you to read

and understand all the goals and ideals in that document and how it can facilitate the progress and implementation of any form of developments in the world, so that you can see for yourself whether those goals have been achieved

“At the same time, look at yourself to see what kind of life you are living. Does it meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals as planned, especially Goal number 4 on education? The future is in your hands, Zamba.

“Now eat some breakfast, my girl. I’m proud of you and I love you,” she concluded as she turned her head towards her daughter in a way that said, ‘You’d better not let me down girl.’

For an 18-year-old girl, this was too much to ask because she had not yet processed it properly. So, all she said was, “Don’t worry mother. I will be even better than that girl.”

At the back of her mind, she knew her mother was right. Zamba, after all, had just completed her high school and did not want to further her education. In fact, all she wanted was to get married to her boyfriend and be a mother of five children by the age of 25. But now she was reconsidering her decision. She decided to find out more about the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030.

What she found out was that girl-child education had become prioritised by all governments. Large budgets were being given to the initiative because the results were tremendous everywhere. Girls were not only performing better than boys in all subjects, but those who entered the job market were also excelling in their fields. Families were stable because, as they say, educated mothers are the backbones of stable families. Children were growing healthier and half of the presidents in Africa were women, all thanks to girl-child education. This inspired Zamba.

She then decided to look for work that summer of 2063 and save up enough money for college. Zamba enrolled into university and started pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Social Work. Her mother was happy and so was she. Then tragedy struck just when she thought she was on track towards achieving her education goal. Her father passed away while she was in her fourth year.

The death of her beloved father devastated her so much that she lost her focus and vision. Zamba dropped out of university and started drinking and doing drugs until one day she was so intoxicated to the point of hospitalisation that she almost lost her life. Laying on the hospital bed with so many drips on her hands, she slowly opened her eyes and seated beside her was her mother. Their eyes met and she remembered the story of Hipainga.

She needed to get back on track, if only to make her mother proud. After being discharged from the hospital, she resumed her studies, eventually graduating with a degree in Social Work. With this near-death experience, she started a program at the university to help students facing similar problems. Her mother and the wider family could not have been prouder of their baby girl. But it also spoke to how parents need to be patient with their children and not give up on them, even in their most trying time. At the same time, family support is fundamental to the success of a girl-child, giving a new ring to the saying that it takes a village to raise a child.