

JFAC Ep 12 Transcript

Is it possible to end world hunger?

[00:00:00] **Ntombini Marrengane:** You feel peckish and so you walk over to the fridge and take a look to see what there is to snack on. There's a nice juicy apple and some fresh orange juice. Just what you feel like. There are so many things that I do everyday that I don't always think about. The reality is that even if my fridge was bare I would hop into my car and drive to the closest grocery store to get something to eat.

[00:00:24] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Welcome, I am Ntombini Marrengane, host of season three of the Just for a Change podcast. If you've been following this series, you'll know that I have conversations with change-makers from South Africa and further afield. In this final episode of season 3, we're going to be hearing more about an incredibly inspiring and collaborative approach to tackling one of the biggest issues in the global south - hunger and malnutrition.

[00:00:52] **Ntombini Marrengane:** According to international organisation Action Against Hunger there are nearly 800 million people in the world who still go hungry and this has only been exacerbated by the impacts and aftermath of the Covid 19 pandemic. There is a difference between hunger and malnutrition. Researchers at Johns Hopkins University define hunger as the distress caused by a lack of food which disappears when we are able to eat enough food to be satisfied.

[00:01:21] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Malnutrition is the absence of nutrients needed for proper health and development. Hunger and malnutrition go hand in hand. Did you know that obesity is a form of malnutrition? And it's important to understand the link between easily accessible, cheap food and obesity. Not all people who are obese choose that way of eating -

[00:01:44] **Ntombini Marrengane:** it is merely what they can afford. And so it's not simply about making sure that people have food, but they have access to good quality and nutritious food. The impacts of malnutrition are not just physical, but are far reaching and it's important to see that the whole picture is greater than the sum of all it's complex parts.

[00:02:07] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Someone who understands this better than many is our guest today. Professor Gisela Solymos is a change maker and innovator within the health sector. She's the co-founder and former CEO of the Centre for Nutritional

Recovery and Education, an organisation based in Sao Paulo, Brazil that has done tremendous work in alleviating hunger, malnutrition and all the associated complex issues such as the psychological impacts of hunger.

[00:02:28] **Ntombini Marrengane:** She's also the co-founder of Catalyst 2023, a fast-growing movement of people and organisations who are committed to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. A psychologist by training,

[00:02:51] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Gisela has been recognised as an Ashoka Senior Fellow, a Schwab Foundation Social Entrepreneur (World Economic Forum) and as an E&Y Social Entrepreneur of the Year in 2011 and 2012. Just a note before we dive into this conversation - we'd love to hear from you. Please pop us an email with your stories of changemaking work or if there's someone you would like to suggest as a guest, let us know! You can email us at berthacentre.gsb@uct.ac.za. Let's dive right into that conversation now. Welcome Gisela.

[00:03:22] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** Thanks for having me here Ntombini, I'm very excited about this conversation.

[00:03:27] **Ntombini Marrengane:** I'd love to hear a little bit more about what shaped you.

[00:03:31] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** I think there are two elements to respond to it. The first one is that, uh, poverty is something that has always bothered me my whole life since I was a very small kid.

[00:03:40] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** I remember walking on an avenue with my mom and for the first time in my life, maybe I was four or five, I saw someone on the streets begging. It was a family. There was also children and I asked my mom, mom, why are they here? I don't understand what's happening. And she said, oh, I, I think
[00:04:00] they don't have enough to eat, so they need to ask for it.

[00:04:03] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** And since then I started dreaming. I couldn't sleep. I would dream awake thinking about how to solve the problem of, of hunger in the world, but actually that's curious. I've never thought about working on this. And, uh, I am a psychologist and I was doing my clinic. My clinic was going, so, so because it was at the beginning.

[00:04:26] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** And so I got this part-time job to do a research on nutrition and socioeconomic status of families living in, in favelas, in slums, in Brazil, in Sao Paulo and that's when it really started. This was like maybe more 25 years after that first impact I had. So that's how it started. We did the research and, and four

years after doing research and developing a methodology to treat malnourished children in slums on the field, there was nothing like that at that time. [00:05:00] We started CREN, our center to recover malnourished children.

[00:05:04] **Ntombini Marrengane:** That's quite interesting. I'm curious about what led you to focus on the nutrition aspect of the poverty that you witnessed when you were growing up.

[00:05:13] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** This was a given. This research was conducted by a professor at university. She was physiologist, she would study malnutrition, physiology.

[00:05:26] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** And the other professor, she was a pediatrician and she would study malnutrition in kids and children, right. So I didn't take this decision, but when I started working I thought the amazing nutrition is really amazing for many different aspects because it deals with the whole person, with the body, but also with the way of living.

[00:05:51] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** Therefore with the emotions, with the psychology, with everything else, and also malnutrition is a marker. It signs [00:06:00] the poor, poorest families in, in a poor environment. So, uh, anyone who works with poverty knows that whenever, uh, you, you will have a poor community, even there, you have people poorer than other people.

[00:06:15] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** You can stratify it and malnutrition signs the, the families who are suffering the most. So it's good. It demands a holistic type of intervention and also it helps us to focus on those who need more attention in a poor community.

[00:06:37] **Ntombini Marrengane:** That's very helpful to think about it. Poverty, as you say, has its different levels and people who are living in poverty are not a monolith.

[00:06:46] **Ntombini Marrengane:** They have different characteristics, different socioeconomic backgrounds that have led them to that path. You mentioned now that you started CREN, the Center for Nutritional Recovery and Education in [00:07:00] Sao Paulo. Can you tell us a bit more about how you started?

[00:07:03] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** Yes. We were a group of people researching malnutrition, right?

[00:07:08] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** And those two professors I mentioned before, they had also applied for a grant to build a center to recover malnourished children in Sao Paulo. Making a long story short, this, the center was built with, um, resources

from the Ministry of External Affairs of Italy. It's a grant from International Corporation for the Italian government.

[00:07:34] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** And, uh, when the center was built, these professors asked me to be the manager, the general manager of it. For me, it was a surprise. Um, but I took it, I was completely involved with the, I had at that time, left my clinic and I was completely involved with, with the work, with malnutrition and fighting poverty in slums in Sao Paulo.

[00:07:58] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** So I accepted it. [00:08:00] Although I, I thought I wasn't, um, I didn't have the skills enough to do that, and that was a, a beautiful adventure to discover how to conduct this work with the team and, and everything else.

[00:08:16] **Ntombini Marrengane:** So what are some of the things that you had to learn quickly in order to do your job well?

[00:08:20] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** I had to learn many different things. I had to learn the administration because I hadn't studied it. I didn't have enough knowledge about nutrition or education in health. So I asked friends of, um, nurse friends, pediatricians, nutritionists to, to come and help me to build the program we had at the center. I had to learn how to do HR management.

[00:08:43] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** Strategic planning and everything. As we would grow, I would have to develop everything from scratch. As a psychologist, I decided to start, uh, looking at the mothers. I wanted to start giving them some consultancies [00:09:00] because they were in deep suffering. I would invite them for a consultancy and would say, hello, good morning.

[00:09:05] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** How are you doing? I'm Gisela, I'm a psychologist. And I would ask them, do you know what a psychologist is? And they would say no.

[00:09:14] **Ntombini Marrengane:** So starting at the very beginning.

[00:09:16] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** As a psychologist, I had to learn again how to deal with a population very deprived from everything. Excluded actually. There I learned the difference between exclusion and marginalization.

[00:09:31] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** Marginalization is when you are at the margins, but you are inside. But when you are excluded, it's something completely different. And, and that was a, a beautiful adventure to discover and, and learn how to, to help in this area.

[00:09:47] **Ntombini Marrengane:** That's incredible. Can you tell me a bit more about the work that CREN does?

[00:09:52] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** Well, CREN is a center to recover children and we work at at different levels. We assist these [00:10:00] children in the hospital, outpatient clinics, and at the community. We go to their houses and, and, and see do pediatric, uh, consultancies or nutritional consultancies. We also train professionals from our primary healthcare in Brazil.

[00:10:16] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** Here I need to do a parenthesis. Brazil has a very structured healthcare system. It's divided in primary healthcare, secondary healthcare, tertiary and quaternary depending if it's something very generic or if it's something more specialized. CREN is at the second level of attention and then we train people who are in the first level of, of health attention in order for them to learn how to identify malnourished children, nutritional problems, and to address it at the primary level.

[00:10:48] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** We also do research, and so we have developed methodologies, but also we have evaluated the methodologies we have developed. And we learned many things about malnutrition and, [00:11:00] and how to recover malnourished children with our research even breaking some paradigms in science in this, in this area. We teach students all the work we do.

[00:11:11] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** Recovering, malnourished children is done with the children and with the families doing nutritional education workshops, assisting them in the the hospital where they stay the whole day from morning to, to afternoon, and they have five meals, nutritional education, pedagogical education in order to help them to develop and to grow as normal children again.

[00:11:37] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Your approach at CREN is multilayered and really takes the system into consideration. You've expressed a deliberate approach as seeing the whole child, right? The child is not just an individual, they're part of a family, they're part of a community, and even getting to the point where you could put all the things in place, you [00:12:00] needed to make your programs work, you had to adopt quite a collaborative approach. Can you tell us more about how this all came about?

[00:12:07] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** I think everything started with us willing to respond to the reality as it is. I give you an example, I told you that, uh, I wanted to, uh, work as a psychologist and help families with their psychological suffering. But at the very beginning I understood that this method, the psychological methodology I had learned at university didn't, didn't work right.

[00:12:32] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** So responding to reality, we would see for instance, that um, children that we would assist in our day hospital, they would eat more protein than that was recommended by WHO, the World Health Organization that, uh, for them to come to the day hospital regularly, we had to involve the families. So we couldn't just focus on children.

[00:12:57] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** We had to focus also and [00:13:00] involve the families otherwise, this nutritional recovery wouldn't be sustainable. But then working with nutritional recovery, so you have, when you work with families and you want to change their behaviors, you need to understand why they are behaving like that. And then you need to address human relationships.

[00:13:19] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** You need to address cultural values or preconceptions, but also you need to address poverty. So our social workers were very key, very important to help these families to have access to social benefits that they did not have access to because they were excluded. But then when we, we start working and dealing with the, uh, healthcare professionals, um, that were also assisting these children on the field.

[00:13:48] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** We realized that the criteria, they, for instance, they would use to, uh, identify diagnose a malnourished child was not the same that we used. We would [00:14:00] measure height, stature to identify malnourished children and, um, WHO and also primary healthcare, the whole healthcare system in Brazil didn't, did not use this criteria for many reasons, scientific reasons.

[00:14:14] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** So we started to promote, uh, seminars, inviting the federal government and inviting, um, the local government to scientifically discuss how do we diagnose a malnourished child. Therefore, if you really want to address the problem you're addressing, you start amplifying, you start a dialogue with many different actors.

[00:14:39] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** Uh, many different stakeholders that are also dealing with the problem, and then they can either help you to deal with the problem or if you are not aligned, and if you don't have, um, an agreement of on how to do that, then you, you guys, um, you don't help each other and the problem is not addressed. [00:15:00] So that's how we evolved until we have influenced public policies, and we still do this up to, to now, uh, at, at the federal government level, but also at the local government level.

[00:15:16] **Ntombini Marrengane:** I think what you've, what you've just explained is, is very important and that's that change cannot happen in a vacuum. Right. So just shifting now for a moment, I wanted to ask you, because it's important for us to understand the impacts of generational trauma when it comes to working in un

under-resourced communities. Can you perhaps talk to me a little bit more about how you encounter that in the communities where CREN serves?

[00:15:42] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** That question moves me because when you work with malnutrition, in my case, it's not necessarily always like that. You can have a crisis and all of a sudden you have everybody that becomes malnourished.

[00:15:56] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** But you are, if you are working in country like Brazil or maybe [00:16:00] countries, some countries in Africa or um, we have this intergenerational poverty and, and therefore it's intergenerational suffering, and this suffering is suffering in your body and is suffering psychologically, maybe in your soul even I would say.

[00:16:19] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** How, how does this suffering happen in your body? If you are malnourished when you are a child, you don't grow well. You don't grow the food, your full genetic potential, right? And therefore you have, you can, if you're a woman, you generate a malnourished child and so you have the cycle but also you, you have, uh, other diseases in your adulthood because, especially women, but also men, when they, they do not grow their full potential.

[00:16:50] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** They become, they, they're more likely to be, uh, to have diabetes, to become obese, to have hypertension, or to have heart [00:17:00] diseases. Therefore, it's what we call non-communicable diseases, right? So you are sick, you are ill when you are a child and, and you, you, if you're malnourished, you have, uh, infections that are repeated.

[00:17:15] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** So you also don't, um, interact fully as a child and therefore you lose the windows of opportunity to learn and to develop, right? It's not that you have neurological problems. You do not have physiological problems in terms of, of the brain. But you interacted less than than a normal child, and therefore you lose these opportunities there.

[00:17:42] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** So, uh, also you, your performance in schools is more likely to be lower than the other kids and so on and so forth and you don't develop your body, you don't learn well and not developing your body, your work, especially with these families. [00:18:00] Uh, you produce less in your work. I'll give you an example.

[00:18:04] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** Workers in sugar cane field, they, when they, they cut, uh, they're paid to cut sugar cane, right? Whenever they have, uh, uh, usually are men, uh, if they are 1.65, uh, meters or higher than this, they cut like 10 tonnes of sugar cane per day. And therefore they're able to gain more money because they

have a minimum that they need to cut and, and they get an extra and they get, let's say richer.

[00:18:36] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** But if you have less than 1.55 meters, uh, you cut less sugar cane, you get less money. But also you are not able to do the whole season of the harvest. Right? So this is one aspect, but the other aspect is also that. I give you a very, uh, concrete example. Now I'm working in a very poor city. In the state [00:19:00] of algo.

[00:19:00] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** We are trying to address poverty, addressing food insecurity, and so we are interviewing families and, and knowing the reality and I met this girl, she's like 16, uh, 17. She's about to finish high school, which is an achievement here because usually people do not finish high school here. And then I ask her, so what are you gonna do?

[00:19:26] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** What do you want to study? What do you want to work with? She said, oh, I, I'm gonna be, um, a domestic worker doing cleaning in the house of, of other people. That's what she foresees for herself. So the other aspect is that I don't see a future for myself. It's like that's, that's how life is and so this, this, uh, wound for me is even deeper, is even more painful than the [00:20:00] wounds that they have in their bodies and they'll be sick for.

[00:20:04] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** Their whole life. Right. Um, but, uh, but the, the, let's say the spiritual, the, the wound in the soul, it's something that, uh, needs to be addressed when you work with malnutrition.

[00:20:19] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Absolutely. And that, that leads me to ask you to share with us a bit more about your experience on the intersectionality between mental health and malnutrition.

[00:20:33] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** Poverty is a sequence of failures to to realize all the, the beautiful things you dream about your life. So you feel like demoralized and feeling like the probability for these families to have psychological and psychiatry problems is higher than you have in other, with people with other socioeconomic status.

[00:20:55] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** So it's more likely that you have depression, that you have anxiety [00:21:00] that you also need to get some medicines to address all the stress that poverty puts on you because you are also exposed to more violent environments. You feel lonely, you feel powerlessness, uh, and you feel fatalist. You don't see a way to get out of there.

[00:21:19] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** So this is all the burdens, the psychological burden that comes with poverty, and especially with malnutrition because this is even more present and in families with malnourished children. The way in our experience, the way to deal with this as I told you at the beginning, it is not just giving psychological consultancies because it's not a, it's not a matter of saying, oh, uh, let's say, let's pretend I'm talking to Ntombini.

[00:21:48] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** "Oh Ntombini, don't, don't worry. Things will be okay. Trust me. Uh, you, you feel better." And we, we talk about your problems and you feel better. You need to have concrete [00:22:00] experiences that, uh, help you to start learning, to start seeing that change is possible in your life. That's why it's so important to, to do things together with the families, to bring them to workshops, to have them sharing the experiences and, and building new things together.

[00:22:23] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** Uh, even if it's cooking a dish, it doesn't matter anything that shows you that you have assets that you have value and uh, and, and that if you work on your own assets, like whatever you know, how to cook, like how to sew or things can start changing. We once had, um, a child, a malnourished child and his family, it was a family with five children.

[00:22:51] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** Two of them were malnourished. They did not have a bathroom in their house so in order to use the loo or to take a [00:23:00] shower, they had to ask for the neighbor. We started our intervention, uh, um, telling to the mom, mom, you need to look at the, the way you are feeding your child. You need to look at the way he's eating so he can recover.

[00:23:14] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** And she, she would answer us, oh, but I need a bathroom. Right. Why? Why would she insist on this? Because she would say it's humiliating to go every time with five kids at house, at my house, you can imagine how many times per day we go to the neighbor and ask her permission to use her bathroom. So I feel humiliated every single time.

[00:23:39] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** This mom, she wouldn't take shower herself and she would smell to give the chance for her kids to, to, to use the, the bathroom of her neighbor. Whenever we were able to, to build a very small bathroom in her house with another project where we succeeded to, to have another small, very small grant, very small grant, [00:24:00] she changed completely.

[00:24:01] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** She had hope again, and she changed also, the way she would look at the, the way she was feeding her children. It's like a, a new life has started, if you understand what I mean. So, It's also a, a matter of, um, knowing that things can change, but knowing concretely that things can change.

[00:24:21] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Do you find sometimes that in, in promoting space for agency of the different stakeholders to, um, unfold, do you find that that at any time conflicts with your mission?

[00:24:37] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** Yes. I do find it because I think one immense, um, challenge we have whenever we are trying to address poverty I think anywhere in the world is our prejudice, our own prejudice, my preconceptions of what? Like, like the example I gave my [00:25:00] preconception was, and, and it wasn't the wrong one. It was the right one because the boy was malnourished, right?

[00:25:06] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** But my preconception was, this is the most important and urgent thing that we need to address with this family now. Right? And we need to be open to review our preconceptions. And, and this is okay, we have preconceptions and we be sure we are open to review them. Okay. No problems. But the problem is that when I do have my preconceptions and I, I, I think I'm right and, and I think the fact that.

[00:25:33] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** As I told you in the beginning, I didn't know how to do this job. It was, it was an advantage for me because I'm always asking, I'm up to now after 33 years, I still think I don't know how to do this job and I, I need, I feel the need to ask. Right? Whenever we don't feel this need, need, we, we, we are not able to know reality and therefore we are not [00:26:00] able to do right Intervention.

[00:26:02] **Ntombini Marrengane:** You've talked a little bit about some of the challenges that you're face in this work, but from my own curiosity, you haven't mentioned, you haven't emphasized that much about money, and I'm really curious as to, um, how is that possible?

[00:26:17] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** That's, that's a great question. I love it. Um, and I think, um, I haven't, because the way I always work is, is about, um, maybe I'll get there, maybe I'll get to the money stuff.

[00:26:31] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** But before, before needing extra money, you need to be able to fully use the resources you already have in place. I give you an example. I was talking with one of the secretaries of this municipal government, of the city government, okay. And uh, he was telling me how he feels, how it hurts him, thinking about people in his city that do not have what to eat. [00:27:00]

[00:27:00] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** That hunger is a very massive suffering and he, his, his biggest desire would be to build, uh, a popular restaurant where people could go and ha eat for free. I told him but, uh, and what about if you, instead of you using this money to build this restaurant, you use this money to help people to cultivate food in their gardens?

[00:27:28] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** And so they do not depend on your restaurant because in a couple of years, whenever you are not in this government anymore, the the next, the next mayor or secretary will close this restaurant. What I want to say with this example is that the city is a very poor city with very small assets but they do have assets, and the first step is how are we foreseeing solutions for this community?

[00:27:55] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** How are we using the assets we have? The first approach they [00:28:00] all have there is that because you are poor, I need to give you things because you're poor, and so you don't have. No, I have, I have this as a poor person considered poor because of my income, of my total income. That's how we measure poverty, which is not a good way to measure poverty because income, it doesn't show actual poverty, and therefore I just see what I think you should have and you don't have.

[00:28:31] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** But then I don't see what you have as a poor person. You have a house. Maybe you have a garden, maybe you know how to do something. Maybe you, whatever, you have a, a strong network or some knowledge that is useful for other people, right? And so that's why I didn't get to the, to the problem of needing extra funds to promote things there.

[00:28:56] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** Also, because whenever you use an extra fund, [00:29:00] It needs to be in order to activate something that is already there. And whenever you get this fund out, whenever this fund finishes, the thing you, you started needs to go ahead. Right? And I think this is a massive challenge we have in our projects too.

[00:29:20] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** There's one thing where I think we do need extra money, which is education or public education, right? Because it's an investment. We need to reinvent the way we do schools. We need to train our teachers. I mean, we should review everything but I can't do this myself in this city because this is a super big problem.

[00:29:43] **Ntombini Marrengane:** You've mentioned the value of research in your work. How do you think this has impacted the development of the programs run by CREN?

[00:29:52] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** I'll give you an an example from my, from my field, right. When we started, as I told you, everything started [00:30:00] before CREN as a a field work conducted by university to know the socioeconomic status and nutritional status of families living in slums.

[00:30:09] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** And we were, uh, based at the university and so we had scientific discussions with other scholars, pediatricians, nutritionists, psychologists,

psychiatrists. So we had, uh, every Thursday we had the scientific discussions from many subjects related to nutrition or malnutrition, let's say in this environment, uh, many people we're working with malnourished children and one of these scholars, uh, came up with, uh, this theory saying, this hypothesis.

[00:30:40] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** He would say, Hey guys, look, uh, we have in a family, we meet different with many children. We have children that are malnourished and children that are not malnourished, and usually the mothers are obese. Therefore, probably malnutrition is related to the way the mother is bonded or [00:31:00] not to her children. The mom loves malnourished children less than she loves the other children because she doesn't feed them because she's obese.

[00:31:10] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** There's food at the house, and therefore these children are not fed. And I said, oh, wait a minute. I don't see this on the field. We have interviewed 530 families, 2,500 people. So I had, I was seeing some people, I was seeing some situations, and so I decided to conduct my master's studying the experience of moms of malnourished children.

[00:31:37] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** And so this was a qualitative study, and what I found out is that those mothers knew perfectly all the context that was promoting malnutrition in their families, but they couldn't face the fact, they loved their children so much that they couldn't accept the fact that they were malnourished, like they the, like, they had a [00:32:00] veil on, on their face.

[00:32:01] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** They wouldn't look to this reality directly. And also they, they were fatalists, they didn't know how to, they, they think things would not change and they were powerlessness and they were lonely. This study helped us to completely change the way we're approaching the families. I was, uh, as I was telling before we understood it wasn't a problem of depression or anxiety.

[00:32:25] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** It was a problem of concretely, uh, learning how to deal with the challenges that life, the poverty gives to me, extreme poverty gives to me. How do I deal with these kind of challenges? And this completely changed our approach and allowed us to establish a stronger bond with, uh, those families. So they would stay in our services.

[00:32:51] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** Other services that were treating malnourished children, they, they were not able to keep these families coming. They would, the families would give up and [00:33:00] they wouldn't actively search for the families to come back. So we changed the methodology based on this research, we were able to keep the families with us and keeping the families, the treat, the children treated for more than two years, we found out that it was possible to recover stature, to recover height.

[00:33:23] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Gisela, you're a well-recognized social entrepreneur. Why do you think social entrepreneurship is important?

[00:33:31] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** I think social entrepreneurs have many, uh, characteristics that, uh, make them essential to, to face today's challenges. First, we are on the field. Second, we are free in, in terms of, we are not attached to any role that we're like governments.

[00:33:51] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** They need to perform in certain, in certain, in certain ways. We, we don't, we are committed. We are complete because we're completely focused on the problem that we want to, to solve. We are open to dialogue with different stakeholders, uh, and we are able to do that. If you look at CREN's example, we, we dialogue with university, with governments, also with companies from different types, with the community.

[00:34:25] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** We have this transit and we are able to dialogue with, with everyone, and therefore we are able to innovate and bring real innovation because we are looking to the field in this broader way and dialoguing with everyone. We are able to see solutions that people haven't seen before.

[00:34:46] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Given the complexity that we're faced with Gisela, in just a few words, how do you think we can move towards a more just and equitable world?

[00:34:57] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** I think we need a, a, a very, very [00:35:00] key but simple elements. See ourselves in the picture, be willing to give up on something and be willing to collaborate.

[00:35:10] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Thank you so much Gisela, for sharing your story with us. Your dedication to this work is so inspiring and encouraging and to see the impact of someone who has done the work right in front of her and the way that it's grown to have global reach and impact, um, has just been a wonderful experience. Thank you so much for your time today.

[00:35:30] **Prof Gisela Solymos:** Thank you so much for having me.

[00:35:32] **Ntombini Marrengane:** I'm sure you'll agree with me that this has been such an inspiring season of the Just for a Change podcast. We've heard from 12 change makers from the global south who are working tirelessly towards a more just and equitable world. It's hard not to feel encouraged by their stories.

[00:35:40] **Ntombini Marrengane:** In July we celebrate Mandela Day in South Africa and I'm reminded of something he said - "you can start changing the world daily,

no matter how small the action". And this rings true as I reflect on the guests I've spoken to this season - they are hopeful despite every reason not to be, making small changes to the world around them everyday... and all these small, consistent changes really do add up. May that keep us all inspired to keep changing the way we're changing the world.

[00:36:23] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Thank you for tuning in to season 3 of the Just for a change podcast, powered by the Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship. We'll be back soon with a new season of this podcast and can't wait to share it with you. If you're interested in hearing more conversations with change-makers, then make sure you subscribe to this podcast so that you don't miss any of our upcoming episodes!

[00:36:45] **Ntombini Marrengane:** If you've enjoyed this content, I'd also like to invite you to rate and review it wherever you listen to your podcasts and feel free to share it with your friends, family and colleagues. Let's stay inspired and keep changing the way we're changing the world.