

## **JFAC S4 Ep.10: What do children's stories have to do with social justice?**

**Sihle-isipho Nontshokweni:** [00:00:00] So many times, even as adults, you look around and you think people, everybody else has it together and you don't. And you can just imagine in the child who sometimes hasn't comprehended that you are in the process of learning and you will be fine, how much more exacerbated the feeling of not being okay is, you know what I mean?

Like, uh, you see it in the story of Wanda where she says, you know, like, but why, why do, why am I the only one who struggles like this? Maybe my hair is a crown, but one made of thorns. And I think when that feeling of being isolated is so exaggerated, really stories can meet kids at that very point of need, even when you as a parent aren't yet aware of really how alone she may feel in that particular experience, that, that stories can become friends. And I think those friends are really necessary to, uh, holding a child on their journey.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** What language do you dream in? [00:01:00] When you're in love, happy or angry, what words do you say? Which songs make you dance? We may have DNA, flesh and blood in common with many creatures on earth. But it's the expression and appreciation of art, music, and stories that sets us apart as humans and allows us to be authentically ourselves. Typically, your family, community, and society make you feel like you have inherent value and you belong. The freedom to be yourself and have fun is best learned at a young age when you hear stories in your native

tongue. And in South Africa, we celebrate a diversity of 12 official languages.

**Nal'ibali YT Clip:** When we are at home I speak to my child in Zulu. My child goes out on the streets, they speak Zulu, and when this child goes to, to school, then he finds an English book. This child, then he needs to read in the language that he does not even know, you know, he knows nothing of this language. The only language he knows is [00:02:00] the language that he has been speaking at home and with his friends on the streets. That's the language that he knows.

So when this child gets to school, he's, uh, it's English, now, they need to associate reading with excitement, now, this language that they do not know, everything is spoken in this language. They are being taught in this language, then, how do children begin to learn reading?

So, it is for that, it is for that idea that we are saying that children must have the opportunity to be read to in the language that they know, in the language that they understand. The language that is spoken at home so that when they read, when they are being read to, when they meet literacy at that early age, they will enjoy because this is the language they know. This is the language that is spoken at home and they will begin to associate reading with fun.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** That was Bongani Godide from an organisation called Nal'ibali, speaking about the importance of first language stories on World Read Aloud Day. Nal'ibali, [00:03:00] IsiXhosa for Here's the Story, is a

national reading for enjoyment campaign to spark a love of stories, build literacy, and promote a lifelong reading culture.

Through Nal'ibali, you can access books written by children and adults, audio stories streamed on the website, and tales told aloud on WhatsApp in 11 languages.

We can agree from an educational point of view, that we need to create safe spaces for young people to use their imaginations and hear and tell stories, but stories, poetry and art can also play a role in moving our society forward, empowering our youth to bring about real change.

**TED X YT Clip:** Art is for everyone and it is a part of all of us. Its deep roots have the power to supersede language, and communicate across cultural boundaries. Art is a historian and an expression of culture, both are [00:04:00] intertwined and so vast that it can't be packaged into tidy and neat concepts. Art may very well evade definition, but we cannot escape its truth. Art has the power to delve below the surface to change actions, affect thoughts, feelings and belief systems.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** Welcome to season four of the Just For a Change podcast, powered by the Bertha Center for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship. I'm your host Ntombini Marrengane. In this season, we've looked at unexpected connections, surprising overlaps, and unusual alignments in the work being done locally and globally that's moving our societies forward in positive ways.

This is our final episode for this season, and what a journey it's been. Just a reminder that the views shared by our guests may not [00:05:00] necessarily reflect the views of the Bertha Center.

Another person's creative outpouring, whether a folk tale, a beat, or a sense of style, has the power to move us. It can inspire us, change the way we think, and mobilise us into action. That's the magic of being a human.

Our guest for this episode, author Sihle-isipho Nontshokweni, knows firsthand about the power of storytelling. Her children's book, Wanda, about a girl learning to embrace her natural hair, won the Skipping Stones Honor Award in 2021. This accolade is given to books around the world that promote an understanding of cultures, encourage a deeper awareness of diversity, and foster respect for multiple viewpoints within societies.

But first, let's hear from Sivuyile Mtwetwe.

**Sivuyile Mtwetwe:** My name is Sivuyile Mtwetwe.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** A young entrepreneur who participated in the Changemaker programme offered by the Bertha [00:06:00] Center and UCT's GSB Solution Space. This two month interactive social entrepreneurship programme merges conventional profit-focused business practices with social purpose driven principles.

Sivuyile has developed a prototype hair product called Remedy Afrique, which is currently undergoing testing. It's made from local African ingredients that work to stimulate growth and strengthen and maintain hair texture for all hair types. I asked Sivuyile to tell me more about how the idea

came about and why he decided to use traditional African ingredients in his formula.

**Sivuyile Mtwetwe:** So I, I started to come up with a business to make cosmetic products, specifically hair products, because, um, I wanted to connect the business to myself and my journey as a person. So a little background about myself, [00:07:00] um, when I was still a teenager, I didn't have much hair so I had to like cut my hair because I had a problem with, uh, ringworms that were growing on my head.

Uh, so in order to treat the ringworms, I had to cut my hair so that it would be much easier to apply all those antibiotics that reduce, uh, uh, the fungal infections that cause the ringworms. So that's, that's when I decided to focus on a product that would sort of treat the, the, the scalp and also be able to style the hair for those who want to style their hair.

I knew that it had to be something organic, so I wanted to use products that could be found in [00:08:00] a regular house household. For example, uh, rice water, you could use it to, to, to create a hair product that can reduce growing grey hairs, so I started to do some research on ingredients that were used by African people in ancient times.

I found ingredients like, uh, shea butter, the boba fruit, and also castor oil. That is, those products, when combined, they can make a product that promotes growth of the hair and also is able to strengthen your hair and also able to cure your scalp so that it does not get affected by ringworms as me when I was growing up.

The reason I decided to include African ingredients in the formula, it's because, [00:09:00] uh, African people, when they wear their hair, it empowers them. So I wanted to also empower people to wear their hair naturally.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** Sivuyile's story shows the power of entrepreneurial thinking and how we can do great things when we embrace who we are and where we come from. Our guest for today, best selling and award winning author, filmmaker, and podcast host Sihle Nontshokweni writes about this intersection of identity and how we show up in the world. Her book, Wanda, co-created with Mathabo Hlali, follows a young girl's journey to self celebration through accepting and loving her hair.

The story teaches young people, especially girls, about friendship, consent, negotiating power, bravery, and agency. Thank you so much for joining me today Sihle, It's great to have you with us. [00:10:00]

**Sihle-isipho Nontshokweni:** Thank you for having me Ntombini, I'm very excited to be with you.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** How did you become a children's author?

**Sihle-isipho Nontshokweni:** Um, how did I become a children's author? I really, I keep saying this line where it was in search of my mother's garden. Um, I was trying to help my mother publish a manuscript that she had written in 1983 um, and at the time she just kept saying this thing, you know, I have this book, I have this book in my, that I want to publish. And eventually after a while, I just said to her, you know what, listen, let's go and

meet publishers, let's meet writers. And I set up a whole like meet writers week, uh, for them. And I think by the time they arrived at the airport in Cape Town at the time, I had this like huge banner that's like soon to be authors. Um, and it was in that pursuit to help my mom publish her work that eventually one of the publishers we had connected with during that time then said, hey, do you and your mom want to submit for this children's writing competition?

And that's really how that particular door opened to me. I'd always been a person who writes, I had a blog, uh, but I'd never necessarily thought of myself as a [00:11:00] children's book writer specifically but I think that door of trying to be of service to her really became the, the joy and the miracle in my own life. And it's, it's just been a wondrous journey ever since.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** Fantastic. A unifying theme in your work is how race based stereotypes affect educational and career expectations in the post apartheid schooling landscape. Tell me more about why this needs to be explored.

**Sihle-isipho Nontshokweni:** I was born, uh, in 1990, uh, really at the end of apartheid in South Africa specifically. Um, and my schooling experience was always such a, for my parents specifically, I think they really wanted their own hopes realised and everything that they couldn't have, to now become established through the possibilities that had opened up to this child of theirs, right? Uh, and so I went to 12 different schools up until where I am right now, where there was a constant like there's a better school.

There's a way to enter into a better school, right? And I think what I experienced [00:12:00] in the South African landscape and even beyond really is the cultural patterns that exist in classrooms, in schools, cultures that almost feel like, like almost like they've been systematically taught right around your identity, around your place of belonging, around who you can become in the space in which you are in.

And, and I think for me then starting to realise that the kind of environment you're in shapes in a way your sense of identity, your aspirations, what you believe is possible for you, uh, in schools, it was other kinds of incentives and rewards, right? It's who can become prefect, who can become captain, like what is available to you and the testaments of that.

And, and I think that really became an important question, understanding the kind of two tale education system that we have in this country, uh, and what it is people believe that they can have, because I think that's really an essential starting point. Really to being able to catapult your life forward and be [00:13:00] able to pursue the vision that you have for your life.

If you have those limiting beliefs and they've been instilled in you, not just by your home environment, but also your schooling environment, which is meant to be the equaliser, you know, like education should be an equaliser, but if that also then perpetuates and highlights those inadequacies, and in inefficiencies in the social system, what it does, I think, is that it compresses, um, student talent, it compresses the kind of leadership we can have, the kind of possibilities that people can then be able to create to change the world, which I think is what we are all in some way,



fundamentally here to do. And so I think exploring that effectively and understanding some of those barriers to entry in the identity and in the soul of a child can really help us to unlock uh, potential.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** I love that education as an equaliser. I think there hasn't been a lot of reflexivity on how the education system actually reproduces the inequalities that we have in [00:14:00] this country in particular um, and you're right. It, it actually. should be a gateway, um, to the future for our young people.

How does your passion for social justice weave its way into your stories?

**Sihle-isipho Nontshokweni:** Oh, in every way, right? Like, I'm a politics graduate, and I did my master's in politics, and I think I've always been like, very conscious of this, like, the deprivation of the soul, right? Like, you know, Ted, uh, Gurr's, uh, relative deprivation of, like, what other people have, what other people can't have, right?

Like, and I think if you just, if you look at the story of Wanda, Wanda is a story about an eight year old girl. Every single day, her mom turns her hair into this beautiful cloud and she kind of has to go through this like transitionary moment between the school bus and getting into school and what she knows her teacher will say.

It sounds like it's just a children's book, but that's really an exploration of a systematic pattern that you see in South African schools, right? So we wrote Wanda in, I wrote in 2017, that was [00:15:00] before the school's protests in 2018 and I think really what that story then really highlighted is

the existing patterns, systematic patterns that are already existing in schools that were part of our experience that you then see in children's lives.

I think one of my most, uh, like politically imbued stories is called, um, it's Chicharito, and it's about an ant that's trying to escape a socialist state, right? And move into the kingdom of Zombo where they can have, like, it's like the, the, the city that never sleeps. And that story really explores, uh, communism versus capitalism for children, but in a really engaged way, I call the queen of that particular story, Queen Nyerere, and that's around Julius Nyerere, their kingdom is called Ujamaa, right, Ujamaa, and that's also really based on that socialist state, but of course, it's all imbued in storytelling.

And I think you can really be able to lift societal aspects, right? Like, uh, what it is that people think they yearn for, [00:16:00] uh, what, what individualism versus, uh, a collectivism system looks like and you really just put that into, into children's work. One of my, my other stories is called Fly Africa Fly. And it's about a little rural boy who imagines that he's been, he's a pilot and he teaches everybody how to make little pilot papers.

And I think everything that I almost want to see in, in the world, which is a lot of it is justice, it's fairness, it's equality, it's opportunity. I'm almost able to just bring that into the world of imagination for children through stories and equip them in that way uh, and, and hoping that, that, you know, that belief that you can put into a children's story can really, um, shape their own

souls so that they become more, you know, they can become more out of their own lives.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** Definitely. I have to tell you, there's a moment in Wanda the Brave where what you're saying about reflecting the transition from home to school, um, Wanda mentions what her teacher [00:17:00] says about her hair and that really, that hurt.

**Sihle-isipho Nontshokweni:** Yeah, she says, she will say it's a bird's nest. She said this to the other girls before, right?

And then in Wanda the Brave, when these two girls meet for the first time, they go to different schools, but the one says, Oh, your teacher says the same thing, right? And I think that's about like the systematised, like, experiences and cultures of school all through a children's book, which is why I think children's books are so powerful.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** Why did you choose Wanda's hair as a symbol of her identity?

**Sihle-isipho Nontshokweni:** So when I wrote Wanda, actually it was, um, the first transcript of it came as a blog and it was called African Rapunzel and it actually, I think in part, was my own story, I just started my dreadlocks at the time and I was living in China. I submitted a picture of myself for an audition with a weave on, and then they called me back, but I'd taken the weave off, you know, and I was saying to my partner, you know, I just don't think they'll think I'm as beautiful with my natural hair.

[00:18:00] um, and I think I hadn't been conscious of what I had internalised about beauty, about identity, about worthiness in relation to her. And I remember them, uh, in their own defence saying, well, that would be crazy if they didn't think that, you know? And I think it was in that moment of having somebody else's protection, so to say, that you realise what Lewis Clark says, there's places like this everywhere, places that you enter as young girls and boys from which you never return.

And I think then this particular symbol around hair and identity caused me then to reflect on my own question, like, oh, what is it that you've come to believe? Right? Like, uh, and even if you don't want to admit that that's what you believe, but all of your actions signal this, right?

So if you're going to an event, you have to go and do your hair a certain way, right? Like if you were thinking of going to a friend's wedding, right? Like there's a particular hairstyle that you would want to do that to you symbolizes beauty. And I think the thing about it is that consistently, it seems like the further away it [00:19:00] is from what you naturally are, the better it is.

And I think to me, that's just a symbolism of everything else, right? Like, so even the idea of where you went to school growing up, the further away it was from your home, which was really my experience. I went to a hostel when I was six. The further away it is from your environment, from your home, from what you already have been, which is imbued in black culture, apparently the better it was, right?

And I think hair as well becomes such a huge signifier of all the ways we almost self reject even without realising what we're doing, and all the ways in which we, we, we don't really embrace how we come and who we are, uh, and even if you like your hair in a different way, but just feeling beautiful in your own skin and in your own hair is such a powerful affirmation of all the ways that you already are without needing anything else outside of you.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** Wanda is available in English, Afrikaans, IsiZulu and IsiXhosa. Why was it important [00:20:00] to publish it in more than one language?

**Sihle-isipho Nontshokweni:** Because I think the same way we speak about, about hair as being an affirmer, I think language, right, is. Language is so personal, you know, it's It is how you, most of the time, how you laugh, you know, certain kind of like energies that are like really part of what you would say with your family, which is the people that are closest to you.

It's such a representation of how you connect with the communities that you come from, and I think just being able to, to learn in your own language, to pick up a book with a girl whose skin looks like yours, and also in the language that is yours, I think every single time affirms your right to claim space, you know, to take up, uh, the world as you are.

And I think language is such an incredible and important affirmer of how we learn, so yeah, language is a very big part, especially in South Africa, where you have so many cultures that are coded in language. And I think being able to embrace those entirely is an [00:21:00] important aspect of what we can become as a country.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** Wanda has evolved into a theatre production, a website, an annual festival, and more. Wanda the Brave, the sequel, was released in 2021 and will soon become an animated cartoon. What do you think is the most powerful medium for storytelling in pursuit of social justice?

**Sihle-isipho Nontshokweni:** I think radio and television, which is really scalable media, has such incredible power in being able to reach a multitude of people.

Uh, I think social media in a way digitalizes, uh, what the book is already is, you know, but I think our ability to use television for stories is huge because if you think about it many of us who may be listening to this podcast, we grew up in different communities, different countries, but we can relate to certain films that we all got to watch together at the same time.

And I think what media does is that it actually shapes right? It's social imagination because you identify to those particular characters, right? So Barbie [00:22:00] was a TV show, right? If you think of kids wanting to speak right now in Peppa Pig's accent, which is the English accent, they're getting to watch that.

Like "don't go, It's daddy," you know, like Coco Melon and if you think of what YouTube is doing right now, It's millions of views globally of the exact same shows and what they get to do. They literally are painting children's like identification to stories. And I think if you're able to scale beyond the book into all those multimedias, there's so much more reach.

I think in South Africa, radio is a hugely powerful tool, um, that can reach across, uh, communities into rural communities as well. Um, multimedia is such an incredibly essential tool in being able to get books and stories out into larger communities.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** What stories would you like to see more of in the world?

**Sihle-isipho Nontshokweni:** I think imagination, I'm really excited to see how African stories start to move beyond [00:23:00] really correcting elements, which is like really trying to correct things that should have just been fair, you know, like and into stories of power. I think I just, I want to see more African superheroes, right? With capes and powers and abilities that exceed our natural world.

I think part of what stories are meant to do is to ignite our imagination, make us believe in the possibilities of what there are, there is in the world and so I'm really excited for more sci-fi kind of stories, for more imaginative stories, for more empowering stories, um, and for global stories. I want to see our stories being the ones where parents are saying, that story is not banned in my house because this child wants to speak like an African, you know, like they, they saying this "gx gx" thing that I can't like, you know, I can't hear it.

And therefore I want to ban it. And I just think children's stories, especially because they have such long legs and life have so much capacity to influence the world and I just, I just imagine like, what are all the ways in [00:24:00] which we can draw and pull from our various cultures and create

a semblance of characters that are coming from here that influence the world globally and have our kids thinking, Oh, kids from America are reading it of course, you know know our stories, you know, and I think that's really exciting. The prospect of that is something that I want to be a part of. Yeah.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** What is the importance of mother tongue teaching and children's books for educators in South Africa?

**Sihle-isipho Nontshokweni:** I mean, I think one of the biggest struggles in the South African education system right now, right, is just thinking about how kids, for instance, will learn in mother tongue, right, up all the way to grade three, and suddenly when they get to grade four, they just change into English learning.

And I think there's such a huge gap that happens in being able to comprehend. I think what literature can really do and how we imbue and imbibe, um, stories in that transitional period around language, right? Can be such a powerful source of how we continue to engage children and I think there's a way to tell stories that [00:25:00] really can evoke a curiosity of learning.

And I think being able to almost like pair, there's the classroom content that needs to be done, um, But there's also the stories that are existing in the libraries. And I think if, if kids have their almost like their own agency and volition towards a book, towards their learning, I think that can aid teachers so powerfully.



And I think being able to think beyond the content of the classroom, which of course is a lot already, if you think of what teachers in this country are facing, but I think being able to really have a tripod system, so to say, there's the classroom, there's the content, but there's also, um, beyond the classroom curriculum, which exists in stories and when kids identify themselves and they see themselves in those stories, and they feel like they're part of the world of those stories, they continue to want to read.

And I think how we do that early on in the early life of a child really can shape and increase the cognitive development of how teachers are able to empower kids in the classroom. So, yeah, really fortifying the libraries in schools, the content that they're learning [00:26:00] beyond the classroom that can really shape, uh, the learning experience of kids, I think can really be of support.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** Wanda's grandmother plays a pivotal role in awakening her confidence. To what extent does this reflect your own journey? How did your upbringing and family influence who you are today?

**Sihle-isipho Nontshokweni:** Now, my family is like the, my very heartbeat, you know, and I think, um, in particular, my, my grandmother and my mother as well, you know, I was speaking to somebody this weekend, um, so one of the works that Wanda World has published is called Unobuntu, which is my mother's book, and we turned that book into a documentary. And I think what seeing my mother as a writer and understanding that she gets that very gift from my grandmother has been such a critically important part of my own identity of being able to claim my power as a writer. And I think

what happens in the story of Wanda is this intergenerational transmission of [00:27:00] confidence, right?

Like where Wanda's grandmother says, look at these women, they look, they have hair just like yours and then eventually says, and she's like, Oh my God, this is what you were like? And then she says, look at your mother and she's like, oh, my mom had big hair like me? And then eventually she's able to claim the parts of herself that in this present day society.

Because I think every single family in a sense carries almost like a family mission and that we become gifts into the world. And so those matriarchs in my life are so critically important for my mom, she is such a believer. She's a massive believer in terms of anything that I do to her nothing is impossible.

She'll just say to me, "You know, sisi, you really need to, to show Oprah the show you're doing, you know," like, and to her, because there's so little limitation like she really thinks like Oprah will find the show, the ultimate book show, which we're broadcasting on the SABC three and we'll love it and put it on the O Network, you know, like, and I think [00:28:00] having, um, mothers, especially who grow with their children, is such a powerful experience as an adult now.

And when I say grow, I mean, they grow in their own lives as individuals, uh, because then you're able to dream alongside them, to believe alongside them and to almost share, right? Your gifts together yeah, I think, I think, uh, um, yeah, grandmothers, mothers, aunts, especially, uh, there's such a matriarchal power in being able to see who they are for who they are, not

just in their roles and all the ways in which we can consistently and continuously intergrow.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** What has been a significant challenge in your work and how did you overcome it?

**Sihle-isipho Nontshokweni:** I mean, I think that the business of creativity, the creative economy sometimes can be so nebulous, I think because a lot of the work I do is primarily born out of passion. You know what I mean? and I think really being able to shift from just the passion and the creative aspect of it to saying, [00:29:00] what is the business model of this creative enterprise that you're growing?

What does it look like? How does it generate revenue? How does it pay salaries? How does it establish itself in a sustainable manner? I think that takes really time to fully develop and to figure out. Uh, but I think one of the ways that you're able to really get that right is being able to really lean into what is your skill set. So, so the book is a representation of that, but what are the skills that you carry into being able to develop that work beyond the book? And how do you systematically and strategically do that in such a way that the business itself then becomes a sustainable growing work, right?

So I think one of the things that we, we, I mean, people ask me all the time, even on my social media is how, how can I write my first book? and for a long time, I'd like kind of almost like mentor people one on one until we realised actually we can turn this into a codified course, you know? So I

think really being able to harness and clarify how to grow your passion? So worthwhile. [00:30:00]

**Ntombini Marrengane:** What has been the impact of your story so far and what plans do you have for the future?

**Sihle-isipho Nontshokweni:** I mean just this morning I was speaking to a lady who was saying that they've been having problems with their daughter's hair and afterwards, she wanted to, uh, her mom to do her hairstyle, she says she usually like throws a tantrum, right? Like, but on this day when they were reading the book decided actually like I want this particular hairstyle from the book.

And I think those aren't, it's, it's difficult to say what, what the exactitude of the impact is, but I think in terms of people wanting to become something and just how that morphs and moulds itself into, through the world of the story to me, is such an incredible, um, like I think impact point. Those are the one on one kind of, uh, impact experiences.

The, the Children's Book Festival that we do every year, I think part of what we're doing there is shaping an idea, right? Like, of an African character that has so much potential and prospect to go here [00:31:00] and beyond. And I think that the excitement of that and the possibility of that is really incredibly energising and I just, I can't wait to see what can happen with Wanda to the world. Wanda to the world, yeah. That's, that's what we call it. And those are some of the measures, but I think the more personalised one are just such an incredible, incredible continuous experience. Yeah.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** So we've been asking all of our guests, cornerstone questions at the end of each episode.

And so now I'd like to ask you, why do you do the work you do and what makes you hopeful?

**Sihle-isipho Nontshokweni:** You know, it's so funny, so two weeks ago we were hosting, um, a writer's workshop for the Eastern Cape province. And, uh, one of the facilitators, uh, his name was Mnoza Melani, he's a radio writer and he came and he spoke about writing radio drama.

And he was talking about the power of storytelling and what it can do to just shape our minds and imagination and I literally sat on the edge of my chair thinking, you know, like sometimes you can kind of be almost [00:32:00] like a. some pessimism about the way the world is, and then I thought, even if you never wanted to have children, the best joy of bringing children into the world is so that they would be able to experience a streak of storytelling, like the joy of storytelling and all the ways in which it can evoke a curiosity for learning.

I think part of, of doing this, seeing how people can come alive to themselves, to their own ideas, I think we, I don't think we do enough with the potential that children carry. And I think I do what I do because every single time that I come on stage, I literally see teachers, parents, children awaken to the story itself, but also to their own purpose and their own potential.

Most of the time teachers will say, come, come teach us how to teach like that, right? Like, or you'll do a reading and they'll say, oh my gosh, I thought I was teaching, but what was I doing? And I think being able to evoke other people's own purpose, right, through stories is so invigorating that I, I never wanna stop doing this. It's, it's so [00:33:00] incredibly satisfying.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** What does social innovation mean to you?

**Sihle-isipho Nontshokweni:** I think social innovation is being able to, to engage the culture, the times of a people and be able to shape innovation out of who they are. I think anything that is birthed out of, out of identity, most of the time has such power, uh, for, for potential for affirmation, but also for people being able to see themselves in, in what is being innovated.

So I kind of always think part of South Africa's education, if we think about social innovation for education, I'm like, South African kids dance, you know, South African kids sing, right? Like South African kids are so creative and artistic and what do we do with this like reservoir and deposit that already exists and being able to tap into that. Even in the classroom, right?

Like, so how do you take that and use it as part of how we're able to get better matric results in the end? And so I think being able to innovate out of who people are, [00:34:00] is such a necessary and powerful mechanism to be able to really create change. So I think you can't say, Oh, we, we are doing education as we we've always done it.

It's who are the people you're doing it for? So engineering out of culture is such an important, I think, part of how you can be able to really create social change.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** Wonderful. Wonderful. Thank you so much for spending time with us, Sihle. Um, it's been an amazing conversation and as a mom, I'll be looking for your next book.

Um, for the, for your fans here in Durban. Thank you so much.

**Sihle-isipho Nontshokweni:** Thank you, Ntombini. Thank you for such an engaging, um, and just such an inspiring interview and so thoughtful as well, just in the questions that you brought to the conversation.

**Ntombini Marrengane:** It's inspiring and exciting that stories like Wanda's are being told and shared with children around the world. Seeing themselves represented more widely will hopefully inspire more young people to lift their voices and express what they [00:35:00] think. If we listen carefully to them and each other, we can all be powerful agents for social justice.

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This podcast is produced by 2Stories in collaboration with the Bertha Center for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship. Written by Linda Scarborough, produced by Carol Williams with audio editing, engineering, and sound design by Kozi Mzimela with production assistance from Without a Doubt Agency. Special thanks to the Bertha [00:36:00] Center team for their input on this series. For more information on resources used to create this episode, please refer to the show notes.