



## **PODCAST TRANSCRIPT - EPISODE ONE - SOUTHERN AFRICA**

**IETM - International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts**

*Climate Justice - Through the Creative Lense of the Performing Arts*

**Podcast Episode One** - December 2023

The following episode is the first in a three part podcast series commissioned and produced by IETM. Across the course of 2023, a number of regional Focus group discussions took place in across three continents where the vital role of the performing arts in the face of climate justice and climate change was discussed at great lengths. The aim of the podcasts are to reflect on the conversations that took place during these Focus group meetings and to explore the meaning and implications of climate justice on the performing arts sector, as well as to highlight actions taken by the sector to respond to the climate emergency in different socio economic contexts. The first episode took place in Southern Africa, with five southern African performing arts professionals and in collaboration with HIVOS, an international development organisation which aims to contribute towards just, inclusive and life sustaining societies where people have equal access to opportunities, rights and resources. All recordings took place on Zoom in May 2023. The group's facilitator, Samantha, is here to tell you more about the discussion and what to expect in this episode.

Hi, my name is Samantha Nengomasha, and I am here to introduce the following podcast which contains contributions from five Southern African performing arts professionals.

They came together for a focus group discussion on 11 May 2023, which was commissioned by IETM and facilitated by myself.

The aim of the focus group was to gain a better understanding of the relationship between the Southern African performing arts sector and climate justice. We did so by directly involving professionals from the region. Throughout the discussion we dissected several key topics, such as awareness raising, community engagement, gaps in society, inclusivity and injustice.

The following speakers from the following regions took part in the discussion:

### Zimbabwe

1. Edza Isu/Action Hub: O'Brien Makore
2. Simuka Comedy: Wencilacy Katuka 'Kadem the Comic'

### Zambia

1. Africa Directions: Mark Chilongu
2. National Arts Council Zambia: Maanka Adrian Chipindi
3. Zambia Popular Theatre Alliance: Philip Kaluba

We hope you enjoy their insightful and interesting observations.

### Topic 1 - Awareness raising

<b>Sam</b>	'What do you think is your role as a performing artist when it comes to the subject of climate justice?'
<b>O'Brien</b>	'Our role as performing artists with regards to climate justice is to simplify the issue of climate justice. It is a technical subject. The majority of people don't understand what climate justice is. Some of the creatives don't even understand what it is. So our role is that we simplify the message. We package it in a way in which the general citizens can understand. Then we can disseminate the information. That is our critical role as artists.'
<b>Kadem</b>	'My issue is similar - art is responsible to put these tough topics like climate justice - which may be difficult to understand - we are there to simplify it and put it in easy to digest, entertaining format. We all know our citizens - we have to entertain them.'
<b>Mark</b>	'I want to emphasise on the need for an artist to be involved and included in the highest level of decision making. What we have seen is that global development partners think on behalf of Africans on that level - especially on behalf of the artists - they say 'you are a comedian from Zimbabwe, can you do this piece of art for us.' If half of the population does not understand what climate justice is - that also includes an artist - and if an artist does not understand what climate justice is and you are using it as a vehicle for change - it means that they must be involved at every level and provide the technical support on how we can use the arts to create awareness for the masses.'

### Topic 2 - Need for a coordinated approach

<b>Sam</b>	'What I am getting from your responses is, first of all, the role to communicate, the message to disseminate, but before that, the need to be educated on and about climate justice. Because there's a very fine line, if there is still fighting between climate justice and climate change, where most of us can understand what is climate change, not everyone can know where justice begins in that process. Where are the gaps in society
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	when it comes to the relationship of the role of the performing arts in climate justice?’
<b>Mark</b>	'There is a lack of coordinated approach when addressing climate justice. We are all approaching it in an ad-hoc way. Now we see that yes, the government has a commitment that the issues of climate change are addressed...but there is no coordinated approach with other sectors or other like minded institutions. How do we give this a more holistic approach so that individuals, government, stakeholders and society all play a key role in addressing the issue?'
<b>Adrian</b>	'I think, whatever it is we're putting in place in terms of climate justice, we must utilise the artist as the researcher. The act of operating in a community - when a community encounters a lot of dynamics, a lot of issues, it can be very beneficial to designers 'up the food chain', if I may call it that. We need to have a mechanism where the interruptions of an artist can also be a feedback system.'
<b>Kadem</b>	'It becomes difficult for artists to package this content into material they can actually disseminate. The lack of scientific knowledge - to simplify these issues in vulnerable communities - no artist can solve this issue 100%, but there needs to be partnerships in the communities that's low running in the communities itself. The government should also play a role in cementing all the partners together. The scientists that actually study the thesis on climate change issues need to teach us. Our role as artists is to simplify these issues into content that is easily digestible and recognisable for our different local communities.'
<b>O'Brien</b>	'It is very critical that the government start to recognise the artists as critical audiences for advocating for climate justice. Just like my brother in Zambia has highlighted - the disconnect between the academic and the artist I believe the academics serve a greater role, they need to connect with the artist. There must be a connection between the people who go to the communities to disseminate the information and the academics who do the research.'

**Topic 3 - Communities and climate justice**

<b>Sam</b>	'We talk about climate justice within the community but maybe I want to be more particular about 'what' justice and 'which' communities are at a disadvantage. How are the communities experiencing the different effects of equal representation and even distribution of resources? When we're talking about climate justice we also talk about the inclusion process. Let's be more specific - what is the influence of climate justice and when we seek it, what exactly are we seeking? Who are we talking about in society?'
<b>O'Brien</b>	'Looking at the influence of climate justice on the performing arts, I think from previous engagements, performing arts has the impeccable power to disseminate information and also try to influence the communities to act. If we look in terms of climate justice we are looking at the climate crisis, we try to connect it to social, economic and

	<p>generation, specifically in Africa. We are experiencing a lot of negative impact from climate change - yet we do not contribute a lot to the causes of climate change. At the end of the day, that is the climate injustice. We need to make our communities aware that as Africans, we contribute less to the causes of climate change, yet we feel it the most, because our communities rely on agriculture, like rural communities. Funding is determined by those from the Global North. They have the funding. When it comes to the Global South, where we have less contributions to the causes of climate change, this funding comes in drops. This is where the critical need for funding is.'</p>
<b>Kadem</b>	<p>'I believe when we speak of communities - what are the communities and who are they? We are speaking to the public communities that we are looking at. Different towns and environments are affected differently by climate change issues. For example, people living in rural areas are affected by different climate change issues. In order for us to empower them we need to let them know the climate risks that are involved with the climate change issues in their particular region. I believe the human brain has been configured to understand issues when they are told what can go wrong. I think that's the first step we can take in order to empower them. They need to know what can go wrong.'</p>
<b>Mark</b>	<p>'We in Africa are being requested through the arts to try and ensure that we become climate aware and begin to act. We see that it is denied in some way economically. People here want to adhere to climate justice issues and act upon them - but what are the solutions for those that are poor? Those are the questions we are asking. There is no place where climate justice is more desired than where it is denied.'</p>

**Topic 4 - Learning opportunities from communities**

<b>Sam</b>	<p>'Are there any other positive outcomes that can come from the communities? Not just the 'top down' approach but also the 'bottom up' approach. What can we learn from the communities we are representing? We're not just teaching them but we're also learning from them to respond to the climate crisis.'</p>
<b>Mark</b>	<p>'As long as we create a collective space for dialogue on the climate crisis and the people begin to understand that this situation is 'our' problem, the members of the community themselves can come up with solutions. The bottom up approach can help turn the tide on the climate crisis. There is also a lot of misinformation around climate issues, a lot of lies, and this is reaching the communities. We know how lies travel faster than the truths. That affects the communities in terms of decision making and responding. How can we take advantage of this information gap and how do we close it? How do we use the artists to dispel some of these lies to these people? How can we communicate correctly? How can we engage them in a space where they understand that this is an issue for everyone? How do we listen to these voices so they are incorporated in our plans and strategies so it's a more collective approach than a one sided approach?'</p>
<b>Kadem</b>	<p>'Another thing that we can learn from communities, specifically those that have faced climate justice before, is understanding how they responded and how they adapted to</p>

	climate disasters for the benefits of other communities.'
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### Topic 5 - Creativity and local perspectives

<b>Sam</b>	'Maybe we can move on to creativity and local perspectives. Here I think it's more in tenor - of course we are trying to solve global and regional problems, but how can we as performing artists address climate justice? What is the best way to design our programming, our shows, package our messages? What is the role of creativity in influencing and narrating local perspectives?'
<b>Kadem</b>	'So I was speaking about the need for us to use artists that come from respective communities so that we don't discriminate on language barriers or inclusion/people living with disabilities, issues with gender, etc. We need to be inclusive with artists so the message reaches everyone. This could create 'climate justice ambassadors' I was talking about within the respective communities.'
<b>Mark</b>	'Generally, as artists, we must be able to know that the climate crisis is a cross-cutting issue. And because it's a cross-cutting issue, we must be creative enough to see how we can integrate climate related messages to the work we are already doing. We must also see the best way to design the programming around the climate crisis - this all comes in through training, capacity building of the artists to convey this information. When they are thinking about creative approaches to the climate crisis, they are able to creatively make that type of piece that is going out to the community with an informed position.'

### Topic 6 - Inclusivity and injustice

<b>Sam</b>	'What exactly is it about exclusivity and participation - is it something that is a standalone - even though it's cross cutting, we still need to give it attention or address it as a discipline as its own.'
<b>Mark</b>	'The artist is an afterthought. They will be thought of at the last minute. They'll call you the day before and say ' <i>we have a performance tomorrow, can you put together a team?</i> ' I am expected to stop everything that I am doing and accommodate these people. When you look at human relations and this type of approach, it lacks respect in these aspects and professionalism. We need artists to be engaged and bridge these gaps in terms of empowerment and that the artists participate in the developmental agenda. If you leave out the artist, you are being unjust. It makes it very difficult for the artist to provide a professional contribution.'

These discussions highlighted multiple ways the performing arts approach climate justice, ranging from embodying experiences and awareness raising to community empowerment. They have also underlined that the concept of climate justice is little known and sometimes perceived as an imported concept. What clearly emerged is the need for an enabling environment allowing

performing arts organisations and artists to access funding, training and professional development opportunities.

The outcomes of the regional discussion also nourished IETM's research report ['Climate Justice - Through the Creative Lense of the Performing Arts'](#) - which is now available to download, read or listen to via IETM's website under our resources. We hope you enjoyed this first episode of this podcast series - stay tuned for the next two episodes, where we will visit Latin America and Asia.