Trevor Oahile is committed to entrenching responsible volunteering and activism, as a path for young people across Botswana to be the change agents for the change they want to see in their communities. He believes that it’s not enough to be angry or frustrated by your situation, but that young people need to become more intentional about their behaviours and actions. And he should know a thing or two about how your actions can lead to positive change and impact. Trevor has just been nominated as one of the finalists in the Future Africa Awards, considered one of the continent’s pre-eminent awards that recognises the achievements of outstanding young people. It’s an initiative of The Future Project, which together with the AU Commission, acknowledge the work being done by talented and innovative young people across the continent. Trevor, who has been nominated in the Community Action category, was totally taken aback when he got the call about the nomination. “It felt amazing to be recognised by your peers. It says that you are on the right track and to keep on doing what you have been doing, because it’s making a real difference.”

Sexual reproductive health has been a focus for this 23-year-old since he was in Form 1. When he was 14 years, Trevor was introduced to the importance of sexual reproductive health and just knew that it was interlinked with education, poverty alleviation, equality and socio-economic development. Having seen first-hand how peer pressure and poor decision-making was leading to risky behaviour, resulting in spikes in HIV rates and teen pregnancy in his community. “I figured out back then that if I wanted to have a future, live a healthy and productive life, then I needed to change my behaviour. And change my friends.” He consciously made the choice to change, and there and then decided to become a SRH champion to help others to choose a different path.

Trevor is a firm believer in surrounding yourself with extraordinary people, because he believes it will push you to work harder, be more present and committed. “Some of the most successful people have said that their success has been down to those who they surround themselves with, so if you are inspired on the daily, you in turn can inspire others and so the circle grows and we build a community of young people who are a force for change.”

Critical thinking, communication and resilience have been identified as key skillsets that young people will need as they navigate the world beyond Covid-19. Trevor believes that critical thinking is crucial for young people who are trying to enact change. It brings with it the ability to adapt and adjust. “In so many cases we see young people being fobbed off or called ‘angry youths’ by our leaders. But when young people are able to apply critical thinking to a problem, they are able to analyse the issue and come up with solutions rather than just saying we have a problem. That has far more value and impact.”

Adding that you should not be beholden to your solutions, as they are never cast in stone, but rather that they should be adaptable to any alternative solution that might arise.

His passion for his advocacy work is tangible. But Trevor will be the first one to advise a young person that if you are not putting in the hours, you won’t see the results. One thing he says he learnt very quickly, is the importance of knowing your area of advocacy inside out. “You need to immerse yourself in policy documents, global commitments and reports, latest research documents, basically anything that will help...
you be better informed. It means that when you engage, you do so with authority and you can hold leaders to account when they have not met their promised commitments.” He calls this smart activism, where you use your knowledge and insights in a smart strategic way to achieve your objective. This approach has helped Trevor to meaningfully participate on a number of reproductive health and rights issues impacting young people in Botswana. He is most proud of the Age of Consent law that he, together with other motivated youth activists, supported by local NGOs, was able to change in 2018. “Through our efforts we managed to change the law of consent to marriage from 16 to 18 years. A real victory for young men and women.”

In today’s world, activism needs to be undertaken on multiple platforms. So when Trevor is not knee deep in research, engaging leaders, or doing outreach through workshops or conferences, he hosts a weekly radio show, Don’t get it Twisted, on Yarona FM. “On the show we talk about everything that young people are going through. So issues of safe sex, what contraceptives to use, HIV and how vibing can lead to bad behaviour and life changing consequences. It’s an open, free space where young people can connect, learn and hopefully adjust.” He says that the radio programme has been a godsend during the Covid-19 pandemic. “As we had to social distance, it really helped us to continue with sharing knowledge and information and just allowing young people to share their circumstances.”

When Trevor looks back on what he’s achieved thus far, he smiles wryly and says, “If I knew back then when I started what I was capable of achieving, I would have said to my 14-year-old self, ‘wake-up Trevor’ don’t be scared to start, you can do anything!” And he is proving that anything is possible. He is currently working on a new project that he hopes to roll out in 2021. The project will focus on young people who are HIV positive and due to stigmatisation and access to resources, just don’t get the opportunities to benefit from socio-economic programmes. These inequalities are now even more exacerbated due to Covid-19. “The Plan is to create empowerment opportunities for these young men and women through innovative agricultural projects where they can learn skills in how to set up and run a business and in doing so become self-sufficient and contributing members of society.” Trevor envisages a series of Master Classes in different skills that can be offered by government programmes but also the private sector as part of their social investment in communities. “I am currently finalising the project and we are looking for funding and knowledge partners to come on board. So, I will be knocking on a few doors soon.” He believes that when you give people a choice, they feel confident and relevant and that creates lasting change.

Follow Trevor on:

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