

Dr Bernard Siambabala Manyena 1968-2018

Many readers of this journal lost a great colleague and friend with the untimely passing of Dr Bernard on 27 April this year. Academic, practice, policy and community embedded groups have been commenting extensively on this warmest of achievers. His legacy through workplace, love for people and wider influences will be ongoing indefinitely.

Dr Siambabala Bernard Manyena was born in Binga District of Zimbabwe. An online comment that appeared in the wake of his passing wrote: "Coming from a minority tribe called the baTonga, the people of the Zambezi river, he defied all odds and rose to the very best in his field. As a Tonga we have lost one of our own, advisor par excellence".

Dr Bernard first contacted me in early 2002 from Zimbabwe by e-mail due to my then role as the Leader of the recently established MSc Programme in Disaster Management and Sustainable Development at Northumbria University. He had already been highly successful in education as a Head Teacher and in administration, including with qualifications from the University of Zimbabwe. He was Headmaster at Siansundu Secondary School, Binga District and then an Executive Officer in the Administration of Planning and Development at Binga Rural District Council, completing the degree at University of Zimbabwe during that period. He was known for his significant academic capacity, drive and personal substance. He gained timely support from the Cannon Collins Trust in Zimbabwe and his trajectory continued following the move to Northumbria.

Completing the MSc programme early in its evolution he gained the highest grades of his cohort of scholars that year. Latter, he went on to work with Northumbria University as staff, also gaining a significant PhD Degree there in 2009 on "Disaster resilience in development and humanitarian interventions". Following many successful projects with Northumbria's Disaster and Development Centre (DDC) he later went on to spend a period in Manchester University, setting up and leading related programmes there before returning to Northumbria in 2017.

During the 16 years I knew Dr Bernard, it was clear he was achieving many of his personal goals to significantly contribute to subjects that mattered for his people and for us all. He immersed himself in emergent debates on interrelated disaster and development studies and the themes that have proliferated since, such as on the concept and applications of resilience. A glance through his publications reveals that how he engaged both local and the global challenges that this field exposes. Some papers, such as on "rethinking resilience" published in 2006, remain highly cited on a weekly basis to this day. A series of further papers and evaluative reports were to follow. He contributed to issues concerning disaster risk reduction, humanitarian support, local governance and related complexities as part of a world within which he was embedded both academically and in everyday life. He developed strong working links with any group that would help us to move forward in this field.

However, Dr Bernard knew that being gifted academically was not all there was to be motivated by. His subject would take him frequently back into communities in parts of the world where a fair chance in education remains highly elusive. He knew intelligence to be not measurable solely in formal arrangements of institutions, but in contexts where survival and goodness comes through the beat of a different drum. Whilst with us in the UK and working globally, Dr Bernard always honoured his community of origin in the Binga District of Zimbabwe. In the context of various project inputs I had the privilege of visiting his home area where we later gathered for his memorial mass on 8 September of this year.



One of the more substantive advocacy and rural development projects was focussed in this very District. Beyond the Tonga friendliness and hospitality there is a quiet history of struggle and survival; Dr Bernard's understanding of development, displacement, resiliency and creativity had a particularly meaningful tone.

Whilst many of his contributions will go unrecorded, remaining humble and selfless in nature, there is no doubt that he contributed significantly to the sector. He was engaged in many of the inputs of the Disaster and Development Network that earlier contributed to the establishment of the United Nations Hyogo Framework for Disaster Reduction for the period 2005–2015, and the subsequently expanded Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction for 2015–2030. Northumbria's DDC was the first UK academic group to be accredited to that process.

Moving from his region of origin, Dr Bernard was internationalist to the full. He spoke many languages, and created spiritual songs and poetry in his home dialect that may become even more celebrated with his passing. I personally witnessed his adaptability whilst on inputs in Mozambique, East Timor, Nepal, Japan and Newcastle, to name just a few of the many countries within which he had worked for advancing our people centred lever on disaster risk reduction. His influence in the UK was substantial too. We warmly remember Dr Bernard's role in projects with varied groups in the Northeast of England and networking for UK disaster education backed by many institutions. Such activities included integrating closely with the emergency services and diverse academic networks and with local groups such as the Northeast Refugee Services. Dr Bernard's activities gained the support and respect of multiple UK institutions including centres for Education Research, British Council, Commonwealth Scholars Association and the UK Home Office. Beyond the UK, he was active in collaborative work with the University of Kansai in Japan, the African Centre for Disaster Studies in South Africa, the Swedish Defence University and Bindura University of Science Education in Zimbabwe, to name just a few that demonstrate the international reach.

He was well-recognised for inputs to various organisations of the United Nations and regional alignments such as the Southern Africa Development Committee. This was balanced by grounded work with grassroots organisations and government departments in Africa, Asia and Europe. Those with such skills at many ends of the development and disaster management spectrum, with the requisite capacity and care required, are indeed rare. Dr Bernard played a significant role in shaping contexts and outlooks of individuals through his demonstration of personal efficacy and devotion. His legacy in areas core to disaster management and prevention is extensive and we would do well to follow in the direction of much of this work going forward.

It has, therefore, not been my intention here to try to recite a CV, albeit to touch of his accomplishments, to merely highlight that Dr Bernard was a great Scholar grounded in the realities of everyday life of less advantaged communities. He kept his eye on many of the real issues of our time, so-called great challenges that are meted out at both the local and global levels. This was grounded in experience and part of a process exercised personally. It was applied with those who seek to grow, resist and to improve and to be accessible for all to benefit from, not just the few. Whilst there are many more reflections that could be inserted, a couple more follow.

Dr Bernard's life to me confirms anew that it really is better to journey than to consider having arrived, and that it is often the distance travelled and manner in which it is done that is more important than the levels ultimately attained. This is particularly relevant within the academy as well as without. Whilst Dr Bernard achieved great heights within education despite its unrelenting fixation with promoting competitive behaviours, he did not lose sight of why his chosen subject expertise mattered so much more. This included seeking responses to inequity and to addressing struggles of the marginalised, of remaining cognisant of higher ways of cooperation, justice and hope. This is after all the life and work he promoted. Indeed, we will do well to continue to remember Dr Bernard.

Andrew Elvin Collins