



## So...podcast – Episode 27 Rugare Gomo – Gomo Foundation

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- Rugare: Welcome to the So...podcast. My name is Rugare Gomo and I am delighted to have a conversation today with our host John McKenna.
- John: I'm pretty consistent when I say to my guests you know you so I'm going to invite you to do your own self-introduction about yourself and also the Foundation please?
- Rugare: Absolutely. So my name is Rugare Gomo. I'm originally from Zimbabwe. I came to Australia by myself when I was 16 years old with a suitcase and a dream of having an education I would never have had in my home country. Fast forwards 19 years later how I'm related to it is as the Founder of the Gomo Foundation, a high performance coach and a non-practising lawyer. But what I use my life for is really to empower and enable people to live a wondrous life. That's what's important to me.
- John: Obviously words such as empower excites me and we hear them a lot but they are a word that keeps us on track and it's about self-love. I want to talk about the history, possibly current and hopefully not too much in the future, about I'm going to call it the ugly stuff because we rely on western media to know what's happening in Africa but obviously you're going to hear things through different lenses and different microphones and different ears from different perspectives so let's, I don't know go back three or four, five years, about some of the ugly stuff that was going on that really inspired you?
- Rugare: Sure and I think to even get there I just want to share what the Gomo Foundation is. The Gomo Foundation's purpose is to unleash the potential of girls in Africa through quality education. Why that's important to me is I grew up in Zimbabwe. My mum was one of the first





women in her village to go to high school and my grandmother was denied an education completely yet the women in my life were entrepreneurial, they were smart and clever, yet deprived of opportunities and for me that's not okay. And I have a sister too who is the first female in our entire family to have gone to university.

Now in Zimbabwe and in many parts of Africa education is important yet it's not readily available to girls and that's not the society and the world I want to live in. That's not the world I want for my sister.

John: You say readily available. What does that mean to us western people around the world? What do you mean not available?

Rugare: Great. So you know I live here in Australia and the Australian Government provides billions of dollars for children to go to primary school and secondary school. You read in the newspaper the debates on, you know, the government are funding billions of dollars to independent schools, government schools, that's not available in Zimbabwe. They don't have billions of dollars.

Our parents have to find a way for the most part to even send their kids to school and so as if you can imagine being in a family maybe with three, four children with limited resources in that home, there's still a mindset in many cultures that it's more valuable to educate the boy over the girl. So if there are limited resources they will send the boy to school and not the girl and then that has a huge negative impact on society.

So some of the negative impacts are girls entering into early marriages. Girls having children before their bodies are being developed. Early pregnancies. STIs, HIV infections. Domestic violence. That's the consequence in the society when girls are not being educated.

John: Question about culture and where men are valued more than females, is this because of physical strength, that they can work in a field, or correct me if I'm being inappropriate but I just want to dig a bit deeper about





the male compared to the female because we talk about the male being the dominant, is that because they're a person who can breed or have sperm or a stronger?

Rugare: [laughing].

John: Do you know what I mean? What are you talking about, what [laughing]?

Rugare: It's the question, you know that, and it shows up not just in African culture, it even shows up in Australian culture, it's a conversation that shows up around the world. You just go to India, you know you'll hear about, you know, boys being favoured over girls. So it, there is a conversation and it has been a global conversation that boys are more valuable than girls and that's historical. Whether it's because maybe in African culture men hunted and women were the ones who gathered, I don't, I'm not at the source of it, but if you look globally there is that, there's always been this conversation that I've been born into that boys are better than girls. You know in 2020 many of us, not all of us, many of us, think it's absurd. It's even absurd to try to even understand how that even showed up [laughing]. It's the essence of being human. We are all human. Irrespective of your gender, irrespective of the pronoun you identify with.

John: And I think that's why I had my little jumble when trying to create this topic because, you know I, that's, you know I can't even relate to it that there is that imbalance but going back the Gomo Foundation at the moment there is some great things going on and I want to go straight to results because it sounds good that you've set up a range of programs which are benefiting many people. But I'm a great believer, you know, and I think we all are. Give us some hard facts around evidence there's some really good things happening or what are you measuring?

Rugare: Sure. Well for us we are measuring the capability of our girls being able to be the leaders of their own life and their contribution back to their





own society and their own community. That's what we're actually measuring. We're not measuring how many As they got. We're not measuring how good their report card is and I'll bring that on the court.

For example we had this girl, Cecilia, and she was supported through her entire university education. Unfortunately her parents, her mum and dad, could not support her and literally she had top marks for her Year 12 and it's above what we call the A levels and she was in the field farming living on food handouts at that time because she had no resources, money, to go to university, the University of Zimbabwe.

Fast forward Cecilia completed four years of her education in accounting. During that period of time in Zimbabwe where unemployment is over 90% she by herself created a paid internship with the Zesa Pension Fund. That's extraordinary. Because we had provided the support and conversation.

During her last exams at university unfortunately her father passed away but this is what she said. She said yes I am sad but I'm going to be stronger and I'm going to use this to make me better person. So imagine writing your final year exams after finding and burying your father. Horrible, horrifying.

John: For sure.

Rugare: Today 2020 in her first year of being out in the workforce she created a job in accounting for herself in a city Mutare, where I grew up. So I couldn't be prouder because not only did she get a tool called accounting but she was able to have the kinds of conversations to create opportunities for herself and this is what Cecilia said to me. She said Rugare I now know that I'm not inferior just because of my life circumstances. I too can use my voice and tell other girls in my position and situation that they too can make it. That for me is unleashing her potential.





John: I love it. You're talking about education being a key here. Can I also challenge you as the found of the Foundation for those people who value education but there's also a whole lot of people who don't value education and for me that's okay. The reason I say this is I value empowerment, I value choice and control, I value people to be respected, and no doubt for those people who don't like the books and don't want to learn the academic stuff but still want to give to the community, are there any examples, and I'll use the word peer support where that you may be hearing where people may not be going to the classroom but because of the foundation it's having a bit of a ripple effect to others who don't?

Rugare: It's a very powerful statement that you said. So for me quality education is not just in the domain of being, reading books. Quality education could be people listening to this podcast because they get a whole new perspective for what's possible for their life and which gives them an access to take an action. So for me what a quality education represents is an ability to take an action that I would not have otherwise been able to. Whether it's by going to school, whether it's by talking to John McKenna, whether it's learning to sew, whatever. That for me is my domain of quality education.

And so you'll see many people out in the world who have never necessarily gone to school but are making a huge difference. So what I'd like people to be left with is that making a difference and contributing in society doesn't look in any particular way. I personally am the founder of the Gomo Foundation but what do I know about not for profits? Nothing. I didn't come into this knowing about what a not for profit really is. I didn't come into setting up a foundation having millions of dollars. In fact I was in debt but I had a passion and a curiosity of how do I use my skills, my special self-expression, to make a difference.

And every person listening today I want you to know that you don't have to be like me. You don't have to be like Barack Obama. You don't have to be like your friend next door. You yourself are unique and you're





special and you have skills and talents that you can start unleashing to make a difference today.

John: I like the way you keep using the word quality education. Obviously not, not everybody, but for those of us who have had some beautiful education from elders, grandparents and friends. It's a bit like, we often use the word mentoring and peer support, but I love how you've responded around the value of that other person or that other experience and you can use the word quality education looking through that lens.

Rugare: Thanks John.

John: Wow it's lovely to reflect. I'm just taking a couple of seconds to reflect what you've said because I think it's really powerful and really, really meaningful. Obviously I don't want to waste this opportunity because I think the Foundation's done some great work. Do you want to share some more headlines about how you're going financially? The buy in you've had from people around the world and where are things right at the moment?

Rugare: Sure and I think I'd like to just share a snippet of my story in the hope of inspiring our listeners today. You know as I said I grew up in Zimbabwe and I came here by myself when I was 16 years old. I had to raise over \$120,000.00 to then go to university at the age of 18 years old. The person who is on this podcast today wasn't the person who arrived. Believe it or not John I was quiet, I talked like this [whispering] hello. I was shy.

I grew up in a context that white people are better than black and so I felt inferior. On top of that I'm gay and in my home country.

John: [laughing] Right.

Rugare: I go to gaol for being gay.





John: Right.

Rugare: So I had many, many limiting beliefs about myself and about what's possible for me. Some of my limiting beliefs would be why would anybody want to be my friend? Why would I ever get a job? Who would ever want to work with a black person? Would I get opportunities because I'm gay? And I lived in utter fear. I still had a vision but I was not free in my mind.

I now know that many of us, you know, go through that. When I was going through it I felt I was the only one in the world feeling that way [laughing] but it's a shared human experience of course. Unfortunately if it doesn't get interrupted it can lead to mental health issues, suicide, and lots of dysfunction in home and in society.

So I spent a lot of time really pushing through my own limiting beliefs about myself. One of them was being able to make a difference. I mean nobody, nobody knows where Mutare is. In Zimbabwe, very few people know where that is [laughing]. I'm not insta-famous [laughing]. I'm none of that.

John: Does Google Maps pick it up?

Rugare: It does fortunately [laughing].

John: [laughing] So we've got GPS.

Rugare: Fortunately. But what I'm communicating is that I'm just an ordinary person with a desire wanting to make a difference and it started by me being open and vulnerable sharing that I wanted to make a difference back in my communities, particularly where my grandmother was denied the education. So our first programs are in the village where my grandmother was denied an education and inside of the journey itself it has helped me build confidence.





It has helped me connect with people. It has helped me love myself and others in a way I never thought I could. And so I just want to share the hope of all of us are just everyday people just with a desire to make a difference.

John: You use the word open and vulnerable. I'd like to ask a bit more about that please because the word vulnerable can be a negative word.

Rugare: Mm.

John: When you were open and vulnerable were you conscious of it? Did you know it was those two words you were being? Because do you, you know, you know where I'm coming from?

Rugare: Yes.

John: The word vulnerable is normally a negative word but you're, what I'm hearing from you is there was actually a bit of a moment for you that you built on.

Rugare: Yes I, you know, I grew up that being vulnerable is weak. You're weak if you're vulnerable. But as I have had more wisdom and surrounded myself with some really decent people I have learnt that vulnerable, being vulnerable is the only way to live life. For me being vulnerable is power. There's no shame with being vulnerable. Inside of being vulnerable there's a new space for connection.

Unfortunately we have grown up in a world where we are not allowed the space of our in humanity. We are flawed as human beings so anything else to pretend that we're perfect is a lie. I am not perfect. I am not good. I make mistakes. And so any, to pretend otherwise is where you actually in build mental health issues, you in build failures in business, you in build the incapacity to actually fulfil on your vision, and what I have discovered about vulnerability and being really open, you







know that, even that time when you want, I feel like I slightly want to vomit because it's scary [laughing].

John: [laughing] Keep going.

Rugare: Even in those moments I have discovered power. I've discovered the beauty of love. I've discovered people supporting me. I've discovered being carried. I've discovered my own contribution back. That's the space where magic and wonder really can arise in the space of vulnerability.

John: You've answered my question so I'm not going to go back there.

Rugare: Sure.

John: Thank you, that was beautiful. My headphones I'm wearing at the moment feeling warm and that's I want to share with you because I do lots of podcasts but right now although we're using technology with this all online but I'm hearing you and feeling the energy through my ears and my headphones aren't too tight.

Rugare: [laughing].

John: I just want to share that with you.

Rugare: Thank you very much. I'd like to just share one thing about vulnerability and, you know as an example.

John: Please do.

Rugare: I nearly went bankrupt. When I left the legal profession to start my own business I thought I could all have it handled, all of it handled. I should already know how to be the best business person. I should already know how to do my bookkeeping. I should already know how long it takes to make a difference to a client. So I never sought help. I never sought





contribution because I thought that if somebody finds out I don't know that would be shameful. If I find out there's something that I don't know nobody will want to do business with me.

The consequence of that was that I was spending money I did not have, I nearly had over \$80,000.00 of credit card debit and I had to leave, move out of my home, moved into a friend's place, slept on the floor, I had to be fed. That was the consequence of me not being vulnerable.

Fast forward inside of the space of being really honest about what I deal with whether it's in the Foundation or in, in my business as a high performance coach, I accept I don't have all the answers but what has opened up is the beauty and magic of having people like you in my life John. We've met through Geoff who's on the Wisdom Council of the Gomo Foundation now, a board member, you know over 10 years ago.

You know I get to create wealth as a black gay man living in Australia, a migrant, I am now starting to create wealth that I can also give back into my communities in Zimbabwe and that has been about being open and honest and it has made me a better human being and a better leader in the Foundation.

John: People like yourself use be vulnerable, Steve Jobs from Apple said remain foolish I think was his catch phrase.

Rugare: [laughing].

John: They make, they both make a lot of sense. Question to you, any disclaimers around the word vulnerable? Right, if you were to talk and promote your values of being vulnerable to a parent.

Rugare: Yes.





John: Surely there's got to be some disclaimers around listen to your heart, listen to your soul, and have some measures about you can be over vulnerable and get in trouble.

Rugare: Yes.

John: Surely we can say that.

Rugare: Absolutely. The conversation you are now having is about boundaries. So some people think that being vulnerable is about saying everything that's on their mind to anybody at any time. That's not being vulnerable, that's just saying everything that's on your mind to everybody at any time [laughing].

John: [laughing].

Rugare: And so being vulnerable is always expect the other person not to respond the way you want them to. People are not always going to be like yay thanks for being vulnerable. People may have a reaction. But the reaction has to do more with them and for me when I'm vulnerable I also am listening for my community that have my back irrespective of what I do or don't do.

So I have committed listeners, I call them my committed listeners, I have committed listeners in my life, three committed listeners, where I can share everything and they will never listen to me as my doing, they listen to me as my purpose.

John: I love that. Beautiful my friend, beautiful. People are going to love this conversation, I can feel it right now and we haven't even published it. We've got to wrap it up soon but I really ...

Rugare: Oh [laughing].





John: I think we have to brother, we have to, this is so cool. What's missing is a glass of bubbles.

Rugare: [laughing] The usual John.

John: When you think about it. The best chats we've had is a little glass of bubbles.

Rugare: Yes.

John: But it would be, I don't want to waste the opportunity to talk about the Foundation.

Rugare: Yes.

John: Can you please give us an update and especially people around the world.

Rugare: Absolutely.

John: On where things are at right now, what's coming up?

Rugare: Yeah.

John: And quote your website.

Rugare: Absolutely. Thank you so much for the opportunity and for the platform as well to use my voice but really I want you to know that the voice I'm using is the voice of all the girls in Zimbabwe who don't have the access to use their voice. I'm very connected to them so as I'm speaking I'm also speaking on their behalf.

So where we're at right now in the Foundation is we support girls through their entire education, that's from Year 7 to Year 12, which is From 1 to Form 6 in Zimbabwe, that's high school level. And we have





currently, so had our first two girls complete their entire education which was extraordinary and they did exceedingly well in their marks.

Now because of COVID unfortunately in Zimbabwe most of the year our girls have not been at school so that has been detrimental. So unlike in Australia where we have home schooling, where we have access to internet, imagine being in Zimbabwe, you're living in a hut, there's no dedicated electricity, there's no running water, there's no, none of that. What they have are wells, candles, there's no internet so there hasn't been home schooling. So we have been really concerned on the state of our girls being empowered during 2020 and we've been in constant contact with the schools and the teachers are extraordinary because they keep, they are trying to keep on finding ways to connect with the students who are dispersed in the rural areas and in the cities which is very difficult to do.

So part of what we have seen is we have been creating and looking at what other new opportunities that we can create inside of the new world order for our girls particularly in the rural areas. In addition to that to fulfil our purpose, which is unleashing the potential of girls in Africa through quality education, we are also in a conversation of looking at expanding into a new country as well. So it's all about fulfilling on our purpose and creating partnerships to deal with this new world order.

We don't have the answers, all the answers, but we are engaged with the community to find the answers. So we, that's what we are constantly doing. It's not we are here in Australia telling people in Zimbabwe what to do. They have the answers themselves but it's about how do we help facilitate bringing that to life together.

John: Your website please?

Rugare: Our website is [www.gomofoundation](http://www.gomofoundation.org.au) , G O M O, [foundation.org.au](http://foundation.org.au) ([www.gomofoundation.org.au](http://www.gomofoundation.org.au)).





John: It's been a great chat. Thank you for making my headphones feel warm and my heart and my soul. We're both in lockdown Melbourne but what a lovely story and thank you for sharing.

Rugare: Thank you again John. Thank you for the opportunity.

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