

Editorial

Green Nobel Prize for Swaziland

October is the noble month when prestigious Nobel prizes in science subjects, economics, and peace are announced by Norwegians to worldwide acclaim, or sometimes, ambivalence or even condemnation. Given the history of the Noble Prize, one would think that all Africans do is make peace and write English literature. So, it is correctively heartwarming to see Africans recognized for tedious work on the environment. There are now several prizes given by various organizations worldwide to recognize effective grassroots environmental initiatives. These are sometimes called the "Green Nobel Prizes." Green "Nobels" may not be as lucrative or make journalists salivate, but they are no less prestigious or effective in recognizing creativity and long life commitment to the ideal of hard work to change the world. One of the six recipients of the 2010 Goldman Prize given to recognize outstanding environmental accomplishments is Ms. Thuli Brilliance Makama of Swaziland (*Umbuso weSwatin*)¹. Ms. Makama's distinction includes being the country's only practicing environmental lawyer. For her accomplishment, the Goldman Prize citation states that:

"After a grueling three-year legal battle, Swaziland's only public interest environmental attorney, Thuli Brilliance Makama, won a landmark case to include environmental NGO representation in the Swaziland Environment Authority, reinforcing the right to public participation in environmental decision making."

To this, she responds by stating her rationale:

"I defend the rights of local communities to participate in environmental decision-making so that future generations may benefit. "

Ms. Makama's accomplishments should be rightly celebrated. Her reference to the future generations in Swaziland brings up an unfortunate circumstance for which we must all rally round urgently. Among the many unfortunate statistics of life in Swaziland, having the world's highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS - at approximately 26% of the adult population - is extraordinarily disturbing².

Preservation of the environment through community engagement in decision making gives us habitable hope, but plummeting life expectance due to a preventable disease assures despair. To truly honor Ms. Makama's Green Noble Prize, the work must be done to ensure the health survival of future generations. Here we can invoke one of the national symbols of Swaziland, the protective shield (Figure 1), and their motto: "*Siyinqaba*," translated loosely as "*we are a fortress, a mystery; we hide ourselves away*." This is the true spirit of environmental protectionism.

¹ The Goldman Environmental Prize. 2010. <http://www.goldmanprize.org/2010/africa>

² USAID. http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/aids/Countries/africa/swaziland.html



Figure 1. Swazi Shield (reproduced with permission: <http://www.ezakwantu.com/>)

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