

# Africa Storytelling Challenge— Notable Submissions: In Tadzoka Pswarayi's Words

*Committed to championing scientific innovations and advancements, Pswarayi is affecting change in her community and throughout Africa—and this year's judges of the Africa Storytelling Challenge lauded these impressive efforts. Recognized as a runner-up in this year's contest, Pswarayi shares her essay submission below.*

FIRST Global is a US-based not-for-profit public charity set up to provide the framework for an Olympics style robotics challenge. Its mission is to ignite a passion for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) among more than two billion students across the world. FIRST Global invites one team from every nation to participate in an international robotics event that builds bridges between high school students with different backgrounds, languages, religions, and customs. By bringing these future STEM leaders together in an engaging and collaborative competition that drives home the importance, excitement, and applicability of STEM education, FIRST Global inspires students to learn the skills they will need to make the discoveries their parents and grandparents would consider miracles, impossibilities, or just plain science fiction.

In order to bridge the technological gap that exists between African countries and the rest of the world, Impact Hub Harare brought FIRST Global to Zimbabwe. African students are not as exposed to changes within the technological environment and for that reason; Impact Hub Harare, through the Zimbabwe Robotics Team, seeks to empower Zimbabwean students from all walks of life with the essential skills to foster innovation. Tadzoka Pswarayi, the team manager for the Robotics team this year explained, "The programme goes beyond the five children who participated at the global competition and aims to take high-tech education such as Robotics across Zimbabwe in order to leapfrog more developed countries and use STEM to develop our nation." Furthermore, because the number of female students active in programming initiatives is low, Impact Hub Harare encourages girls to participate in the challenge. This year's competition theme was Energy Impact because topics such as climate change have an impact on the sustainability of our world. The objective of the challenge was for the players to power the plant by delivering solar panels & activating wind energy to power the reaction plant. Overall, the scientists ranked 51 out of 193 countries, an amazing achievement given the challenges faced by the team throughout the journey and training period.

The students that participated at this year's event held in Mexico City are nothing short of miraculous. All of them have gone through different trials and tribulations throughout their lives such as losing a parent, having to support their siblings, age restrictions for certain programmes and limited resources to achieve their dreams. These students proved that no circumstance is too dire and no dream is too big if you will it. From almost not making it to the competition due to logistical & financial constraints to winning a bronze medal in the Courageous Achievement Category, which tests soft skills; they proved that anything is possible with a "yes we can" attitude. Science is not just about lab coats and tubes in an isolated nook of the world, it affects everyone, everyday, every minute. In order for the world to develop in an inclusive and non-discriminatory manner, it is crucial that we tell stories of science not only to appeal to the general public but to also highlight its imbueement within our society.

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*The content and views presented here are those of the individual Challenge participant.*

### **About the Africa Storytelling Challenge**

The inaugural [Champions of Science—Africa Storytelling Challenge](#) took place between May and August 2018. Open to all scientists doing innovative work in Africa, the contest drew more than 100 submissions. An independent selection committee of scientists, policymakers and science journalists reviewed the applications and selected the winners. Each winner will be awarded \$5,000 and will have the opportunity to share their stories at the 2019 American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) annual meeting in Washington, D.C.