

Africa is synonymous with poverty and exploitation. Poverty does not originate from poor people; poverty is imposed on them. In Africa women bear the brunt of this unjust imposition which, particularly in the poor masses, is largely driven by entrenched patriarchy.

My name is Xabrina-Michel'li Thompson. I am 23 years old, and am an adopted child from a previously disadvantaged background. As a person who has been uplifted I would like to give back what I have been given, by developing and uplifting others.

In my home country of South Africa there is a bottomless pit of need and the surest way to pull people out of this pit is through education, education which gives them an awareness of the value of their God given talents, inner strengths and resilience; an education which brings them into an environment where these talents can be applied to greatest economic advantage.

In South Africa, the majority of the vast numbers of women who make African beaded jewelry are disadvantaged, informal traders operating from their homes. These women do not have a platform from which to sell their jewelry, and consequently resort to selling on pavements in city centres, and on road sides in the country. This results in exploitation. Their jewelry is purchased by formal traders for a fraction of its worth and sold in their shops for very many times their original purchase price. Tragically, most of these woman live in abject poverty and are not remotely aware of the fact that they are being exploited, and even if they did know, there is absolutely no way that they could do anything about it.

As a student of the Gemological Institute of America's Graduate Gemologist program and the recipient of the Womens Jewelry Association Gabriel Love Foundation Scholarship for 2019, I believe that I can use gemology and jewelry as a powerful instrument for individual growth and social emancipation in Africa. Once qualified I plan to establish a Womens Jewelry Association chapter in South Africa to empower these informal traders, and others, through skill transfer and raising awareness of the opportunities in this field, by making gemological and jewelry related courses available to people from previously disadvantaged backgrounds, people like me.

It is my ambition to leverage jewelry and philanthropic spirit to make a difference in these women's lives, by using the Womens Jewelry Association as a vehicle to help them gain access to precious and semi-precious metals, which they can incorporate into their beaded jewelry, and to assist and educate with more sophisticated design work, so that their products gain greater monetary value. Also to form co-operative groups and an online platform to market and distribute their jewelry so they can be fairly remunerated.

Jewelry making and gemological education is a certain path to self-sufficiency. The Womens Jewelry Association will educate their minds, and more importantly their hearts; because when you empower a woman you feed a nation.

