

Book Review

Author:	Elizabeth Nyamayaro, Scribner of Simon and Schuster UK
Title:	I AM A GIRL FROM AFRICA: A Memoir of Empowerment, Community, and Hope
Place of Publication:	1st Floor, 222 Grays Inn Road, London, 2021
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No. of pages:	261pp. ISBN 978-1-4711-8032-3

Review by: Dr. David R. Snow

I AM A GIRL FROM AFRICA, a book by Elizabeth Nyamayaro, traces her unlikely, yet highly inspirational, rise from near starvation as a Zimbabwean youth to working on, leading global United Nations initiatives. A singular event, a life-saving encounter with a United Nations aid worker, when the author was eight years old became her inspiration and placed her on a dedicated path of a life of service. The words of the aid worker, “as Africans we must uplift each other” shaped and informed young Nyamayaro’s goals and subsequently this critical encounter is a point of reference in the entire book. These seven words, constantly remind and encourage the author as she faces challenges not only throughout Africa but in London, Geneva, and eventually the United Nations Headquarters in New York City. She inspires the reader as, over the course of many years, she rises to serve as Senior Advisor to the United Nations Under-Secretary-General, UN Women. By 2014, she is selected to lead the United Nations “HeForShe” global initiative fighting against and raising awareness of gender inequality.

The book coincidentally provides real world examples of Human Security issues raised in this inaugural edition of *National Security: Journal of National Defence University-Kenya*. The authors’ experiences touch on many of the seven dimensions of Human Security: economic, food, health, environmental, political, community,

and personal. Her truly inspirational memoir also serves as a warning that despite progress in recent decades, much work remains.

Summary

The book begins with a previous encounter with the United Nations aid worker and this life defining event sets the author on a path in pursuit of serving others – particularly Africans. While the book bounces between key childhood events to those later in life, this back-and-forth transition is seamless and proves both complementary and supportive of the two storylines: childhood influences and adulthood in pursuit of and working for the United Nations. The heartwarming stories of family support demonstrate the sacrifices made to achieve the dreams and ambitions of the author. The books early chapters establish the foundation of family influence and recognize the challenges encountered in society, school, and Africa. These early life influencing events include frequent relocation, food insecurity, an emerging health crisis in Africa, and even the independence of Zimbabwe.

The book's latter half, while still linking to personal experiences and occasional loss, focuses more on the authors' work with the United Nations and the globally impactful results. While perhaps the earlier parts of the book detailing the youthful challenges establish the readers connection to the author, I found the latter half of her story no less compelling and one of pure resiliency and determination. These later chapters demonstrate how a single person, motivated and inspired, can make a lasting impact on the world stage. Each professional undertaking, whether associated with the World Bank or UN Women, inspires the reader to "do more". This "do more mindset" also pays homage to her early influences such as the authors Aunt Jane who helped raise her, often while working multiple jobs as a medical doctor in Zimbabwe at the height of the HIV/AIDS crisis.

Conclusion

After decades of government service working with militaries, non-governmental organizations (NGO), and various aid agencies, I found the book compelling. The writing is clear, engaging, inspiring, interwoven with personal observations

and experiences, and supported with relevant facts and figures as appropriate. Though the world is ever changing and uncertainty a constant, the writing of Elizabeth Nyamayaro, reminded this reader of two things. First, we are all global citizens and part of an ever-evolving environment. Global connectivity, whether positive or negative, is a reality and visible for all to experience during the recent COVID pandemic. Second, as the title of the books last chapter states, “It takes a village to raise a child”. This collective effort to care for one another, inspire, and uplift each other is our pathway to improved health, prosperity, and peace. The work of just a single person can make the world a better place and adopting a “I must do more” mindset prepares us for future challenges. **I AM A GIRL FROM AFRICA** is a superbly inspirational story of love, support, heartbreak, perseverance, dedication, and, most importantly, humanity.