

It's time for Africa to tell a new story

By [Mimi Kalinda](#)

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Throughout time, storytelling has largely influenced how people behave and perceive each other across the world. It is this single factor instilled in individuals since childhood that has contributed to stereotyping and prejudice across societies and cultures. Stories have instigated wars and political mudslinging, racial segregation and gender discrimination, generational and cross-country hostility, and bitterness between low and high-income communities.



Mimi Kalinda, CEO Africommunications Group.

Even Africa is perceived in a certain way because of the stories being told about it. The role of traditional media and social media are key players in the way the world views Africa, and possibly contributes to putting the brakes on the continent's development.

How do the stories we disseminate shape how the rest of the world views Africa? How does it affect foreign investment? How does it influence markets and economic output? These are some of the questions we should be asking, along with how to change our one-sided approach.

Even research indicates that attitudes and views have been shaped in a specific manner.

Influence

[The US Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency \(DARPA\)](#), for example, explored the neurobiology of listening to stories and how attitudes and behaviours can change. It found that storytelling changes views about people for the better or worse and significantly influences societies.

“Narrative exerts a powerful influence on human thoughts and behaviour. They consolidate memory, shape emotions, cue heuristics and biases in judgment, influence in-group/out-group distinctions, and may affect the fundamental content of personal identity,” it states.



Innovation vital to Africa's DNA, but so is strategic communication

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Meanwhile [Octavia Utley's curriculum](#) at the Yale-New Haven Teacher's Institute explored this tradition in Africa. She found that storytelling throughout history made it possible for African cultures to pass on knowledge, history and experiences from one generation to the next, manifesting itself in different ways and serving many purposes.

“It was used to interpret the universe, resolve natural and physical phenomena, teach morals, maintain culture values, pass on methods of survival and praise God,” said Utley in her paper titled, *Keeping the tradition of African storytelling alive*.

This data tells us that a story is not just a story. Narratives have shaped societies, and the world has been significantly affected by the stories we have told about each other. Collectively we have all in some way contributed to bias stories without due consideration of its consequences.

So how do we change our views from what was instilled in us as children, and how do we ensure the next generation do not stereotype others?

Perceptions

There are many layers to unravel and now is the time to review our attitudes and perceptions of others. We need to challenge our internal and exported narrative because this is where behaviour change begins. Parents, in particular, need to be mindful about the type of stories they tell their children, and be aware of books they are reading.

Now is the time for the people of Africa to tell a new story. Tell the world about our unique heritage, majestic views, vibrant fashion and tasty foods. Tell them about our talented youth, our humanitarians, our innovations, and our uniquely African projects.

Tell them about our beautiful conservation, our marine research and deep-sea exploration. Tell them about our braais and distinct kwaito music, about our doeks and our love for everything Afro. Because we are 54 strong, hard-working nations trying to build a better Africa for our children. We will ensure that we empower them through our new stories and help them grow into good people without prejudice.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mimi Kalinda, originally from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda and raised in South Africa, is the co-founder and managing director of Africommunications Group, a public relations and communications agency based in Johannesburg, South Africa.