

[The Coming Effects of Climate Change](#)

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We asked three 2015 Mandela Washington Fellows who work in the area of climate change what their countrymen need to know about Earth's changing climate and what it will mean for the African continent.

Asha Shaaban remembers growing up in the Laikipia district of Kenya. "My parents said it was like paradise on earth and everything grew in that place. We had pineapples, mangoes, arrowroots. That was less than 20 years ago, but right now none of those crops grow there." "If you don't take care of the natural capital, in a few years' time there'll be nothing. In Kenya, there are so many industries and so many cities coming up, but where are they going to get the water?"

Shaaban is in charge of advocacy for Integrated Water Resources Management, a program in Kenya to build the capacity of communities to ensure environmental sustainability. "Most of the farmers rely on rain-fed agriculture...the long rains used to come in April and then in September, but now it's so unpredictable. I can't remember the last time it rained at home." She sees the irregular rains' effects reaching beyond agriculture and diet into family life. She pointed to pastoralists such as the Maasai. "They end up going over 300 kilometers in search of pasture and water. They leave their homes for over three months and leave their families without fathers, and the homes are led by the women. As much as the energy sector is contributing to climate change, it is the water resources that are actually affected most. It's the water that you need for everyday living."

2015 Mandela Washington Fellow Asha 
Shaaban

Aicha Mohamed Sako works on data collection for climate change adaptation strategies in Mali. She is starting a small agri-business mainly focused on advice, suitable seeds selection, and adaptation strategies for smallholders under changing climates in Mali. "Farmers need to think about which crops they can use as well as where and when they can save energy to make their businesses sustainable. This is what we do. We try to tell farmers, 'You know your business, but maybe you could change your techniques to be more adaptive.'"

2015 Mandela Washington Fellow Aicha 
Mohamed Sako

Andrew Chikomba's company, Gemwitts Enterprises, works with SNV, an international non-profit development organization, to bring technology and renewable solutions to rural Zimbabweans. "I believe there are a lot of things, as humanity, we'll lose out on. And you don't know what you've got till it's gone. We should learn from other nations that are actually trying to solve the problem. It's impossible in some instances to correct the mistakes that have been committed, so it's best for us to be prepared, take care of our environment, take care of our future. We have to start doing it now."

[From Pain Comes Strength](#)

From Pain Comes Strength

Drucila Meireles. Credit: State Dept. 

Drucila Meireles has had a lifetime of pain. Today, the 28-year-old Mandela Washington Fellow is using that experience to stand up for the rights of women and girls in Mozambique.

When Drucila was young her father beat her mother incessantly, then turned his violent anger on his children. “This was normal to us because it seemed everyone in the community lived like that,” she recalled.

Fortunately, her father also sent his daughter to school. “I devoted myself to study,’ she said. As early as primary school, she gained the resolve and skills that would eventually improve her life.

Drucila excelled in her studies, becoming one of the top-ranked students in her province in Zimbabwe. Then, in secondary school, a roadblock to her happiness appeared. Her mother died, followed by her father a few months later. She and her siblings were sent to live with her only aunt in an impoverished rural area of Mozambique. The aunt would not send her to school. Drucila remembers crying every day, especially when she saw uniformed students on their way to their studies. Drucila thought her dreams of getting an education were dashed forever, especially when her aunt pegged Drucila to be a “cash cow” and “a ticket out of her own miserable life.”

She tried to marry her then-16-year-old niece to a rich 53-year-old man. Drucila resisted, using persistence she had honed in school.

Before long she was offered a job as an English teacher and a place to live at a nearby private school. That provided her the means to get her siblings away from the aunt. It also gave her the independence to start dating. Unfortunately, the man she dated also turned out to be “violent and irresponsible.” She became pregnant at 18, in part, she said, because her community lacked sex education for girls.

“The vicious cycle of poverty and violence seemed to follow me,” she said. Yet, she again summoned the strength to improve her situation and that of her two daughters.

She found another job as an assistant in an organization that served people affected by domestic violence and HIV/AIDS. A year later she was promoted to counselor. She also volunteered as a teacher in a school for orphans.

She then joined LeMuSiCa in Chimoio, Mozambique, where she currently is a program officer. Her employer gave her the opportunity to train in what is called the “solution-based approach” to problem-solving and to “leading from behind.”

“Every human being has strengths and resources, and they are the experts on their own lives,” she explained.

“But it takes time,” she said. “It’s not like sitting one day and seeing there is order” when faced with a difficult challenge.

Drucila also serves as an advocate for victims of domestic abuse and rape, often accompanying them to court and acting as an informal legal adviser for those who can’t afford an accredited attorney.

As a 2015 Mandela Fellow, she studied civic leadership at the University of Delaware this past summer and learned more about problem-solving. “I have the opportunity to go back home and help other women and children who are undergoing exactly what I went through ... to make change in other people’s lives,” she said.

The Future Depends on Strong Youth

Osman Timbo loves politics. He wants other young people in his country of Sierra Leone to share his interest.

The 2015 Mandela Washington Fellow, 28, is a youth league leader who encourages young men and women to become involved in government and business, and to advocate for human rights. During Sierra Leone’s last elections in 2012, he helped young people learn about voting. Timbo said these efforts prepare youth to steer their country toward greater development.

Sierra Leone’s president agrees, establishing a ministry of youth and appointing several young people to positions of responsibility throughout government, he added.

As part of the Mandela Washington Fellowship, Timbo attended the University of Minnesota this past summer. He says the experience expanded his views of leadership.

With 24 other Mandela Washington fellows from 17 countries, Timbo visited local Minnesota groups, including Somali immigrant and Native American communities. He participated in recreational events like visiting a zoo, taking a boat cruise and seeing a baseball game so he could meet various residents of his host state. “It is leadership when you bring people together,” he said.

Osman Timbo, Credit: State Dept.



“Everybody has different interests,” he added. “It is important to build relationships across geographic and cultural difference.” He said he would share that lesson of inclusiveness with his peers in Sierra Leone and others in the YALI Network.

“True leaders are selfless,” he continued. “They listen to the people who elected them.” He wants all elected officials to understand that they “are servants to these people.”

Timbo said his community service experiences in Minnesota demonstrated to him the importance of sharing. At a nonprofit called Books for Africa, he packed donated books that would eventually make their way to young girls and boys thousands of miles away. “I felt like we were contributing to the world,” Timbo said.

At Lutheran Social Services, he prepared food and blankets for people with sparse incomes. “It showed that small gestures can make a difference in people’s lives,” he added.

Timbo also learned to “zoom in” to better understand what others think of him and how to network effectively.

A lawyer, Timbo heads his government’s public-private partnership efforts. He believes that partnerships are the way to go in public-service delivery because businesses and NGOs have expertise and resources that governments often lack. He said the private sector, for example, can be better than government at providing training to local people so they can get jobs that will help them improve their livelihoods and their communities.

Timbo is confident his improved skills will help him in the future. He wants to run for parliament in Sierra Leone. After that, when he meets his country’s minimum age requirement for president, he wants to run for that office.

“The future of our country depends on enabling a strong youth base,” he said.

Produce More, Conserve More with Climate-Smart Agriculture

Farmers can boost crop production by adopting climate-smart practices.



Credit: USAID

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With earlier and longer planting seasons and groundwater supplies vanishing faster than they can be replenished as a result of climate change, farmers around the world need to adapt. To chart a path

toward a future of food security, in September 2014 the United Nations launched the Global Alliance for Climate-Smart Agriculture. “The nexus between climate change and food security is undeniable,” Secretary of State John Kerry noted on World Food Day a few weeks later.

Farmers can adapt to climate change by adopting these smart practices:

1. Plant several types of crops instead of just one or two. If one crop fails one season because of erratic rainfall, pests or disease, the farmer can count on others that may be more successful.
2. Intercrop two or more types of plants in the same field. For instance, plant maize with soybeans, a forage crop like alfalfa, a root crop or tomatoes. This will maximize the use of land while suppressing weeds during the main crop’s young stage of growth.
3. Rotate crops from growing season to growing season. This helps maintain soil health.
4. Use improved varieties of seeds that yield more and resist stresses like low rainfall, disease and insects while cutting down on pesticides that compromise soil health and pollute nearby water sources.
5. Adopt appropriate irrigation to allow for a full crop season and possibly more than one harvest season a year.
6. Introduce legumes like peas and beans and woody trees to fields. These add protein, vitamins and minerals to livestock diets and take nitrogen from the air, converting it to a compound in the soil that improves fertility.
7. Minimize tilling and leave last year’s residue on the ground after harvest. This protects the top two inches of soil from erosion while increasing soil carbon through decomposition.
8. Take advantage of resources like satellite images to monitor weather patterns to make decisions about what to plant next season.
9. Improve ventilation and shading for livestock to keep them productive.
10. Move herds to new pasture areas to allow overgrazed areas to recover.
11. Invest in improved storage and transportation systems to reduce food loss. Wasted food generates more than 3 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide every year, according to the National Geographic Society.
12. Collaborate with other farmers to establish a community seed bank so all local producers can acquire varieties adapted to local conditions.
13. Purchase crop insurance as protection against devastating economic loss.

In addition to these smart practices, governments can devote more funding for research to help farms become more resilient to climate change.

Read about the U.N. [Global Alliance for Climate-Smart Agriculture](#).

Simple Facts of Climate Change

Climate change is likely to make droughts, such as those suffered in Kenya, more frequent. 
(© AP Images)

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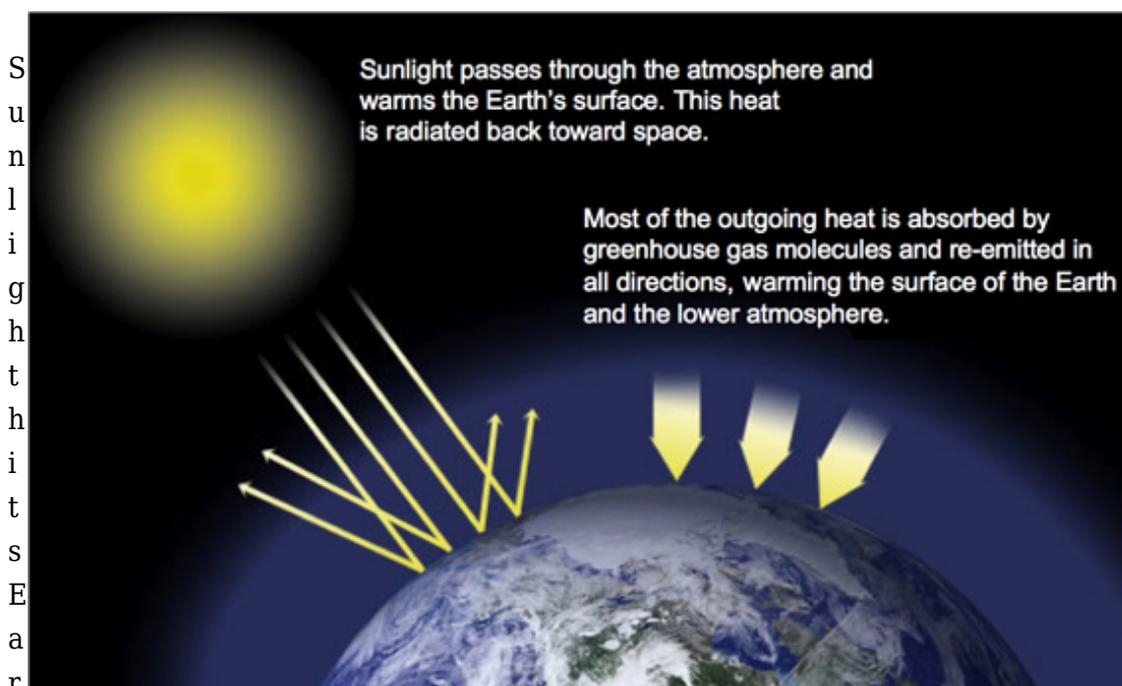
Climate scientists are in nearly unanimous agreement that the Earth's atmosphere is getting warmer. Over the next 100 years, this warming will affect the way people around the world live. Even if you know [climate change](#) matters, you might benefit from a brush-up on the basics.

Why is the climate changing?

The light from the sun that passes through our atmosphere and reaches Earth is radiated back toward space as heat. Certain gases in the atmosphere trap that outgoing heat and warm the lower atmosphere and the Earth's surface.

One of these gases is carbon dioxide, and its levels are raised by natural events such as breathing and volcanic eruptions, but also by human activities such as deforestation and burning fossil fuels. According to NASA, the U.S. space agency, humans have increased the atmospheric carbon dioxide concentration by a third during the last 200 years.

This is a problem because the more carbon dioxide there is in the atmosphere, the more radiated heat the atmosphere traps, making the Earth warmer. This is called the greenhouse effect.



th, which radiates heat back to space unless it's trapped by greenhouse gases.

(NASA)

Weather and climate: They're not the same.

The change in climate over many years can be hard to perceive because of the way our weather changes from day to day. Some days are hotter, and some cooler. But don't confuse weather with climate.

When people talk about the weather, they refer to day-to-day, hour-to-hour fluctuations in the atmosphere. The temperature, humidity and rainfall increase and decrease continuously depending on location and season.

When people talk about climate, they are talking about how the atmosphere behaves year-to-year or — more commonly — during decades or centuries in a particular place. Climate describes long-term patterns, and these patterns show that Earth is getting warmer.

What does climate change mean for Africa?

Although climate change will affect the whole world, Africa is especially vulnerable. South Africa, for instance, has been getting hotter during the last four decades. Average yearly temperatures there have increased by 0.13 degrees Celsius each year since 1960. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, if these trends throughout the continent continue:

- Drought and flood events will be more frequent and more intense.
- Water scarcity will increase, leaving as many as 250 million people without the water they need by 2020.
- Revenues from crops will drop by as much as 90 percent in parts of the continent by 2100.

Looking toward solutions

Although the facts of climate change are daunting, there are significant opportunities to prepare for and minimize its effects. [Climate Partners](#) offers examples of ways some communities, businesses and individuals are reducing pollution. (You can also follow [Climate Partners on Twitter](#).)

[Believe and Strive: Leading the Way for People with Albinism](#)

“A good leader is not selfish and goes for a common goal.”

Joel Tchombosi said he realized this while studying at Wagner College in New York as a 2015 YALI Mandela Washington Fellow. Already a leader in his community in southern Angola, Tchombosi, 33,

started a small group for people with albinism. The group works with parents so they will keep their albino children in school.

Being an albino can be dangerous in parts of Africa, Tchombosi said. Because of traditional beliefs, he said, children with albinism have been hunted for their body parts, which are believed to transmit magical powers.

Joel Tchombosi. Credit: State Dept.



In one way, Tchombosi has been lucky. His parents, who did not have formal educations, wanted him to go to school. Once he was in school, relatives urged him to quit and get a job. But his mother and father kept him there.

School posed some challenges. Because albinism often means poor eyesight, Tchombosi had to sit in the front of the classroom and strain to read what teachers wrote on the blackboard. He endured being bullied by classmates because of his skin color. He called their actions a result of ignorance. "It's not easy living in my skin," he said.

His persistence paid off. When he graduated from Mandume ya Ndemufayo University in Namibe province, he had three job offers. He now teaches English at a school in Namibe.

Tchombosi used his fellowship to learn how other groups work with people with disabilities. He visited the nonprofit Global Medical Relief Fund that brings children to the United States from Africa, Europe, the Middle East and Asia for treatments, surgeries and prosthetic limb and eye fittings. He spent time at another area nonprofit that provides people with different abilities opportunities to make their own money by making and selling crafts. He saw that people with disabilities don't have to rely on outside sources of income.

Tchombosi plans to use the leadership skills he learned to develop a strategy to do even more for albinos in Angola. Having learned how to write a grant proposal, he hopes to eventually apply for funding to pay for strong sunscreen for albinos, who are extremely sensitive to sunlight. "Hundreds of Africans are dying from skin cancer because they don't have sunscreen," he said.

In the book "[The Essence of a Dream 2015](#)," published by Wagner College, Tchombosi writes: "Believe and strive — you rise higher and higher. Faith pays off as sunshine."

[#Africa4Her Generates Support for Women and Girls: Mercedes Leburu, South Africa](#)

Poet Mercedes Leburu has pledged to help women  become more confident. A portion of her poem titled Africa4Her is below.

We asked some of the many YALI Network members who in March made an [#Africa4Her](#) pledge to invest in women and girls in their community how they have fulfilled that pledge. Here is Mercedes Leburu's story.

I pledged to empower young women in South Africa to become confident and lead a liberated lifestyle through writing poetry that will boost their self-esteem; to challenge young girls to showcase their unique abilities, thus moving from being a MIS-FIT in society to being their BEST-FIT; and to groom youth to invest in what they believe in — their ideals, principles and standards that not only benefit them but can impact others.

Young people generally want acceptance, to be part of a tribe or movement, as they are insecure and find comfort in being a part of something bigger. Insecurity is a challenge faced by many young women. We tend to care what other people think, and strive to please others, which robs the continent of individuality.

This gap in my community and generation of young, confident, empowered and liberated women urgently needs to be filled. Our need for acceptance and human validation as young women has diminished our creative thought and thus we tend to be so busy trying to fit in that we have lost our uniqueness.

The growing need to groom youth to invest in what they believe in — ideals, principles, and standards that not only benefit them but impact others around them through their natural God-given talents — was imperative.

I was fortunate enough to grow up having a mentor. I wanted to reach out to those around me and aid them to showcase their unique abilities, thus moving from being a MIS-FIT in society to being their BEST-FIT.

Service is one of the core features of being a strong leader. Serving one another is critical to building a sustainable Africa, because “no man is an island.” We need to be hungry to serve as youth, as we are the future leaders.

Service is not like an extra credit on a test; it is the whole test, and either you pass it or you fail it.

The experience [with Africa4Her] as a whole has shaped my character and has taught me to forge on despite the odds, which is a leadership trait that I can use in the future.

I have learnt to be patient and that little by little I can reach the end goal.

The best thing that one can do in this world is discover who they are and be the best of that person consistently — to express yourself through poetry.

When you focus on improving other people's lives it also improves your life and ultimately contributes to a sustainable Africa, even if it is in a small way.

When God places something in your heart, pursue it relentlessly, be authentic, and be your best fit! At the end of the day, it boils down to how many people you can really influence, how many of those people will influence others, and how many people's lives will change through changing thinking and perception.

I always have an action plan for the things I want to achieve. I act by putting my vision into action. And I delegate responsibility to recently established team members, because attempting to do everything on my own was a recipe for disaster.

As further follow-up to my pledge, on September 5-6, 2015, I will hold a poetry camp.

More than 1,000 YALI Network members made an [#Africa4Her](#) pledge. They represent 47 countries, and 54 percent of them are men. If you made an [#Africa4Her](#) pledge and would like to share your story, please email us at YALINetwork@state.gov and use the subject line "[#Africa4Her](#)."

"Africa4Her" - a poem by Mercedes Leburu

So what ...

If they look at me with their piercing eyes

Scrutinizing my face, body, and thighs

So what ...

If they emit prolonged chuckles when they see me

Endlessly commenting on who I ought to be

I don't break down and fall apart,

Instead I chose to set myself apart

For I know, Earthly eyes can never tell the contents of my heart

So I gear up, ignore it and restart.

[#Africa4Her Generates Support for Women and Girls: Olakunle Adewale, 2015 Mandela Washington Fellow, Nigeria](#)

We asked some of the many YALI Network members who in March made an [#Africa4Her](#) pledge to invest in women and girls in their community how they have fulfilled that pledge. Here is **Olakunle Adewale's** story.

I have started work on my pledge by making an art piece that calls for action by all professionals to invest in girls and women in Africa.

I pledged to invest in young women and girls in Africa using a creative approach that can help improve the outcome of their lives. This will be achieved through art workshops which will be facilitated by volunteer professionals in the field of visual arts in Nigeria.

The products of these workshops will be exhibited on various media platforms — social media, digital media, and electronic and print media. Finally, the works will be exhibited for sale while a percentage of the income generated will be given to the girls and women who produced the works.

The participants will also have the privilege of being mentored by professionals during and after the program.

The painting is a picture of a young African woman  enclosed in a light bulb. The bulb is at the center of an opened book which has the colors of the flag of the United States of America and colors of flags of other African countries. The painting titled Africa4Her shows empowerment for the African woman through investment in education.

I believe professionals should lend support to the female folks who sometimes do not have the opportunities of being empowered like their male counterparts. I feel obligated to help in educating and empowering the girl child as an artist. It is important to create a just society where there is equality in opportunity for men and women, boys and girls.

I have been a volunteer for more than a decade working with nonprofits through community and civic engagement. In the past five years, I have mobilized more than 500 young professionals who volunteered at nonprofit organizations. I have learned about the power of collaboration and teamwork if one is going to make an indelible mark! It has also birthed in me the joy and fulfillment of contributing my quota in making the world a better place.

I volunteered to fill the space and vacuum in my community by engaging my leadership skills in ensuring a better world for everyone that lives within my reach. Everyone is endowed with an ability to innovate, associate, create and cultivate something that would be of great benefit to the world. Most importantly, being a visual artist and educator, I believe art can be used for community development and civic engagement by educating and empowering people around me. I feel i'm a indebted to my society, thus i have an obligation to perform and take responsibility for the development of my environment.

For me, service more of a life style than the gift of service to humanity. It is better to serve than to be served. ... I grow when I sow seeds of greatness into the lives people around me by providing opportunities and platforms where they can increase in knowledge and skill acquisition.

It is best to be a servant leader because it attracts more reward in this world and the world to come. The experience has taught me empathy, compassion, respect for humanity and increased passion in my pursuit of making the world a better place. Leadership is space – not just a place to occupy but a place to multiply people.

Nigerian artist Olakunle Adewale displays the painting he named Africa4Her. 

This experience will make me a better leader because everyone matters, irrespective of their gender, class, tribe or race. So there is equal opportunity for development and empowerment.

More so, the need for partnership and collaboration with people in the community, community leaders and other organizations are good ways to achieve greatness and collective success. It will give me more opportunity to learn from partner organization in my campaign and advocate in

fulfillment of my pledge to invest in women and girls in Africa.

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[Climate Change a 'Critical Issue,' Obama Says](#)

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Global climate change “is going to be one of the critical issues that you face,” President Obama told 500 Mandela Washington Fellows in early August.

Climate change “will affect everybody,” he told the Fellows, who were meeting in Washington for the second annual Fellowship Presidential Summit. Obama added that developing countries will likely be most affected “because they have less margin of error” to cope with extreme weather changes.

President Obama addressed the 2015 Mandela Washington Fellows in  Washington.

Credit: © AP Images

While some countries try to ignore the threat, he said, “you have to project where you will be 20 years from now. ... Find new, sustainable ways of generating energy that don’t produce carbon.”

The president emphasized that the United States supports entrepreneurs working in the fields of clean energy and conservation. He noted that the Young African Leadership Initiative’s [online courses](#) provide entrepreneurs with basic information on how to create a business or nonprofit.

The United States is taking aggressive action to reduce carbon emissions that lead to climate change and will take part in the United Nations’ climate-change conference in Paris later this year, the president said. The Obama administration recently unveiled a major plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the nation’s coal-burning power plants.

Obama pointed out that when he was in Nairobi, he highlighted the U.S.-initiated [Power Africa](#) program. Launched in 2013, the program brings the private sector and governments together to increase the number of sub-Saharan Africans with access to electric power. Part of that, he said, is putting solar panels on the roofs of rural homes. The panels will cost the same as what residents now pay for kerosene.

With more clean-energy lighting, children have  more time to study. Credit: USAID

“Access to electricity is fundamental to opportunity in this age. It’s the light that children study by, the energy that allows an idea to be transformed into a real business. It’s the lifeline for families to meet their most basic needs. And it’s the connection that’s needed to plug Africa into the grid of the global economy,” Obama said when he announced Power Africa.

Earlier in the summer, the president called climate change a threat to national security and said that an increase in natural disasters will lead to more humanitarian crises that pose direct threats to stability. The White House has said that responding to extreme weather competes for scarce resources and will affect the global economy.

In June, Obama announced a [\\$34 million international public-private partnership](#) to help developing countries strengthen their climate resilience.

Volunteerism

The experiences of the 2015 Mandela Washington Fellows were as varied as the programs at their host universities, but they all had one component in common: community service.

Nangamso Koza, a Mandela Washington Fellow from South Africa, wore gloves while shoving garbage into a plastic bag. Along with other fellows at Howard University in Washington, Koza joined in for Nelson Mandela Day with other local organizations cleaning a Washington neighborhood.

Howard University Mandela Washington Fellows joined other Washington organizations to offer  service on Mandela Day, July 18 2015. (State Dept./D.A. Peterson)

“Today, we served the people of DC through cleaning up the streets,” said Koza. “I am representing my village, the people of the Eastern Cape. I’m representing South Africa. I’m representing Africa. They were serving me, and now it’s my turn to do service for them.”

“The program really stresses servant leadership, being a servant of your community, leading by example and engaging through community service,” said Colleen Brady of IREX, the organization that implements the Mandela Washington Fellowship. All the programs the fellows participate in include at least one service event each week.

At Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, Mandela fellows mentored secondary school students on entrepreneurship as well as interviewing and resume writing.

At Notre Dame University in South Bend, Indiana, the fellows pitched in at Unity Gardens, which

aims to help the hungry, offering gardening, food and cooking instruction.

University of Notre Dame Mandela Washington Fellows (from left) Lebohang Selloane from  South Africa, Raindolf Owusu from Ghana, and Veronica Affuah Da-Silva from Ghana (Courtesy photo)

Fellows at the University of Delaware worked with, among other organizations, the Delaware Center for Justice, on gun-violence intervention programs, legal services for both elderly victims of crime and aging prisoners.

University of Delaware Mandela Washington Fellow, Amina Nur Alkali (center), speaks with  representatives from education advocacy groups. (Courtesy photo)

“To be a leader, you have to be serving people,” said Setloke Lekhela, a fellow from Lesotho. “You have to get out of your office and be part of the people.”
