

# **Annex C**

## **Most Significant Change stories**

**A compilation of the Most Significant Change stories collected during the developmental evaluation of DOEN International Culture Programme.**

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## Stories from Kenya

### THE ARTS CANVAS (The Theater Company)

#### (1) We gained access to the right networks

*Author:* Antony Ndungu

*Activity:* Training workshop by The Theater Company, 2002

*Story collected by:* Claudia Fontes and Yvonne Owuor

*Date and Place:* 19 October 2009 | Nairobi, Kenya

My name is Antony N'dungu, I'm an actor by profession. I do stage acting, screen acting, and also radio. I come from Jericho, a neighbourhood where crime rate is very high. Young people have given up, they have given up hope, so they turn to crime. There are so many guns in our area, when we hear gunshots we don't get shocked, we don't get surprised, it's a normal thing.

But in Jericho we have also produced some of the greatest people of this country, we don't just look at the negative side! The first African man to win an Olympic medal for boxing was actually my neighbour- Robert Wangila. When it comes to talent, we've produced some of the greatest people in this country. Young people there believe that they can never make it academically, even if they go to university, they will soon quit because they don't have the right connections, that's what people believe, unless you have a godfather you can not make it, you can not penetrate. So they channel all their energies into the talents they have- acting, football, boxing, basketball, anything, and they do it passionately.

Then we decided as young people we can be able to bring change in our community. So we formed a drama team, a drama group, and we accommodated everybody regardless of their denomination or religion. We just wanted young people from that community to come and exploit and explore their talents, and that's what they did.

So we were tackling issues like drugs and substance abuse, prostitution, abortion, many other things, things that were affecting our society, our community. And it was powerful, it had a really great impact because it was young people talking to young people- young people in our area have become rebellious, they won't listen to anybody, and that's why they resort to bad, bad things. It was interesting because many people changed, including myself, because I used to take alcohol, I used to abuse drugs, but then again nobody told me to stop. Then I realized, here I am telling people that drugs and substance abuse is bad, but I'm also in that. So it's difficult just to preach with your mouth, but your actions are very powerful. So I changed.

Many other people were watching, many other people were informed in our area, and many young people started looking at us as role models, and they thought "oh yeah, we can also stop that and do something meaningful with our lives". But we've had so many challenges. One of our lowest moments was when our chairman committed suicide, we never knew why, it just happened and we almost gave up. But then again we said, we will still continue. After around 2 or 3 years one of our girls, while we were coming from rehearsals, she was shot dead, and we were together with her, it was so painful. We contemplated quitting and saying 'to hell with this thing, it's not helping us at all; here we are, we're trying to do something good for the community, and one of us died in her quest for trying to change the environment, trying to change the community'.

But we still went on, and we were able to change so many young people in our area, we have changed so many, some of us are living off from what we started during that time, and that's what is supporting us, paying our bills, so many people from our area have benefited from that.

Another thing, we became a family, we became so closely knit together that if one of us had a problem we'd go and help each other any way we could, and we've grown with that culture up to now. For instance tomorrow, we want to do a skit and then shoot it, then produce some cds and sell, because one of us is having a wedding in December, and he's really depending on us, and we don't have that money to support that wedding because his family is not that strong financially. So we want to produce cds, sell them to the

community, and all the proceeds to channel them to the wedding, and see how we can help him. Because it's good when a young person in our area is doing a wedding, that's something great, as it is an area known for teenage pregnancies and stuff. So we have to make it big and we have to do all we can to support him. I can say that art, acting, has changed my life, has made me change other people's lives, and is already changing the lives of so many young people in our area.

Contributing to this change, in 2002 I attended one of The Theater Company's workshops, and through that we've got some training, whereby whatever you gain you go ahead and disseminate it to other people in the society. I gained so much information, I also got contacts because you get to meet with people, that's how we got to meet people like David Ojay, we acted together. It helped us to grow, because we were doing things, but we had never received formal training, so we were just doing things the way we thought they were to be done. But when we get to meet people like Mumbi Kaigwa you get the training and you get to know how things are supposed to be done. And to do that you get the right networks, you know how to market yourself, because we were just used to acting for our community. If you don't know how to market yourself, you don't go, you are just there, you stagnate.

After the workshop we've worked with professional theatre groups in Kenya. I have worked with Heartstrings Ensemble in Kenya for 5 years, I have worked with Phoenix Players, they are the best theatre companies in Kenya.

Right now I must say the theater industry is really kicking, so we talk to the youth groups, motivate them, show them how they can make it in this industry. It is tough but it's very interesting.

## **(2) It's in the past**

*Author* : Lydia Nyambura

*Activity*: Performance Skills Training Programme of The Theater Company in 2006.

Story collected by : Claudia Fontes

*Date and Place* : October/November 2009, by e-mail

When we did the performance skills training project back in 2006, the play we came up with was from our own stories. We all sat down one rehearsal day and each one of us told our life story. I came to realize that we all had something similar that each one of us had gone through despite our diverse backgrounds. It made me become a very open performer, holding nothing back when on stage because I don't have to be afraid anymore. There is nothing to hide. It was so meaningful to me because it was like a therapy session. Today, I and my 4 friends go to high schools and do motivational sessions and I tell the students about my life as an encouragement that they can make it in life no matter what. All this thanks to the day I opened up and told everyone around my story.

[For instance], I went to a school in Thika town where a student had been raped, just like I was, and when she heard my story, she came to me after the talk and opened up to me. Her uncle had raped her and when she told her parents, they beat her up calling her a liar. Her performance had declined since then but I have kept in touch with her and she's working on her grades.

There are others who come from physically abusive homes, like I did, quite a number who I currently keep in touch with.

It means the world to me to be an example to young minds in that they can believe in the importance of the present, learning from the past and preparing for an informed future.

I have never felt more fulfilled, absolutely wonderful after watching a crowd of sometimes disinterested young minds change attitude right in front of your eyes. The impact of that is overwhelming.

If I were financially stable, I would go to every school in Kenya and even across the borders. I feel very honoured to be able to influence a young mind into loving, believing in and appreciating themselves no matter what they've been through.

It is with The Theatre Company that I have been able to perform in the community.

### **(3) Women Hurrah**

*Author* : Lydia Nyambura

*Activity*: Direction of theater play performed by TIKKA, which toured in Mexico in 2007.

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes

*Date and Place* : October/November 2009, by e-mail

I worked as a director with a group of women living with AIDS called TIKKA on a performance that they took to Mexico in 2007. I have never seen such a group of women who were so alive, despite their HIV status. I was humbled, I was amazed and it made me to even cut out completely any bias thoughts I had before about people living with AIDS. Today, I have a relative who's living with HIV and I see nothing wrong. In fact, the more I can do to make her life more comfortable, the better I feel.

This is all thanks to that special group of women. I will never forget them.

### **(4) Chanzu, a woman from Malindi**

*Author* : Ben Ndubi

*Activity* : "Ghitaa and Kigezindoto" performed by The Theater Company

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes

*Date and place* : October/ November 2009 I by e-mail

Through the theatrical events that have been organized by The Theater Company, I remember a touching story of a woman in coastal Kenya, to be accurate in Malindi, who stood for more than two hours for our acting session of "Githaa and Kigezindoto". This is a play in Swahili, which touched her life. After the performance she approached us and without [wasting time] she narrated her story to me. The story was the painful life she was living; she moved me so much to the point of shedding tears. This woman whom I shall call Chanzu struggled very much in her childhood to get education because her parents passed on while she was still young. She had to do all kind of odd jobs to get educated. Fortunately, she managed to get married to a wealthy man. But as the saying goes "not all that glitters is gold;" the man started abusing her.

Chanzu was not allowed to move outside the house even a single minute without the permission of the husband. So there was this time where her time of delivery came and the husband was not around so she called the midwife to help her at home. Now that was a big mistake that she had committed. The husband came back and found out, then he ruthlessly sent her off without the child and after a few days the child died.

The trauma of that instance is still fresh in her mind. However after watching our stage performance, she felt kind of relieved because she realized that she [was one more] among the many people suffering even more than her.

It was educative to me because I believed I did my part not only to entertain but also to touch people's life situations; this was vivid when she came [and] narrated what was related to the staged play I performed at that day. I felt I had exposed and encouraged the real life situations of the time.

### **(5) The story of Ambutsi**

*Author* : Ben Ndubi

*Activity* : Theater plays organised by IPAL (Institute of Performing Artists Limited) in prisons

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes

*Date and place* : October/ November 2009 I by e-mail

Following successful theatrical art by The Theatre Company and Arts canvas, who have sharpened my profession, I have managed with Ipal to participate in some shows in prisons around Kenya. After attending a number of workshops with prisoners, we managed to come up with a play from one of the prisoners who narrated to us a story after he left the prison.

Ambutsi, a 24 years old, was imprisoned because of touting. But due to the believe of many people, all those who are in jail are criminals. His sentence was two years. When the sentence was over he went home only for people to turn him away and subsequently no one to employ him because he was from prison. [He then] opted to do something worse in order to go back to jail where he found [it] more accommodating than his home because people did not understand why he was imprisoned. [To me], this indicate: let us give people a second chance, let us not rush into conclusions before we know the reasons behind any action.

Through the theatre I have manage to reach out even to prisoners and talk to them, when you bring out a story that touches people's lives, they will be happy and relate their lives to it. My eyes have opened through The Theatre Company to the needs of the society today in Kenya as we reach out to them; as a street thespian it has taught me to be alert always because anything can come out of street audience.

## **(6) My creative process was enhanced**

*Author* : Rogers Otieno

*Activity* : The Theatre Company Performance skills Training Program in 2006

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes

*Date and place* : October/ November 2009 I by e-mail

After working as an amateur actor for three years, I got the opportunity to join The Theatre Company Performance skills Training Program in 2006. As a result of the course, we created a devised play called "Ghitaa" that has since been performed in various parts of Kenya.

I have since kept a working and mentoring relationship with the theatre company having been part of the cast in Fire By Ten 2007, GITHAA 2006-2009, SAUTI KIMYA AND AED (Academy for Education Development) project 2009.

I was also hired by the company to direct various groups out of the city-in Athi River and Thika town. In the process, I have developed a passion for leading in Performance workshop using the basic framework of The Theatre Company approach to performance Arts and other styles that I have researched or discovered.

The most significant change experience at the training program was the ability to

-Develop strong vocal ability

-Skilful postures and movement used during exercise of Yoga, Feldenkrais, Suzuki method and East African choreographers.

-Developed a culture of making notes and keeping records of my progress this has helped me to create a discipline of self-analysis and criticism towards my work development.

The directors of The Theatre Company have been tirelessly generous in sharing contacts. Through this, I have been able to network with serious practitioners in Theatre and film who have offered interesting opportunities.

-Training on how to audition helped me a big deal in preparing for auditions and having a nice time with the casting agents as opposed to before when I thought it was a painful process.

In general, getting training and working for the Theatre company has improved the quality of my work. This has led to working with the best theatre and film practitioners in the country.

I would say my creative process was enhanced. I became confident in drawing work from my own background and lifestyle other than emulating the conventional ways. To make my point clearer, let me explain the state of Kenyan Theatre. The major forms of performances were and still are:

-Set book performances which are a business of commercial theatre which do plays about the literature plays being studied in Secondary school.

-Then there are the foreign plays, which are mostly farces (trousers) from the United Kingdom written some years back.

-The other one is Theatre for Development, usually performed in the communities to educate on particular funded messages.

You notice that the space for a performer's creativity is quite slim in these areas.

When working with The Theatre Company, I was encouraged to tell and perform my own stories and let the other themes rotate around them.

Currently, five other actors and I are working for the Theatre Company and Academy for Education Development in an awareness campaign project. We are touring the Eastern and Western parts of Kenya as we perform a play 'HOMA NOMA' (A BAD FLU!), to inform the public on the importance of preventing the avian flu pandemic.

I am grateful to the DOEN Foundation for funding programs that are beneficial to up and coming East African artists.

I suggest that funding and other forms of support offered be made available to dedicated practitioners who are or have the potential to make an impact but they do not have professional skills and ability to write proposals that meet the organization standard. The organization has taken the right step by arranging for a feedback workshop and seeking to meet the direct and indirect beneficiaries of the resources.

Thank you and feel welcome to my shows and rehearsals.

**Note of the editor:**

Each user in this evaluation was asked about the negative aspect of the positive change they were describing. Most of users didn't answer this question, or referred to negative aspects in logistics or organization of the activities, rather than a negative aspect of the CHANGE, so we ignored the answer. Rogers Otieno did answer about the negative aspect of his positive change:

The only negative aspect [I can point out] comes when sides that are supposed to join up and work together feel more important or better than the other. While that can be explored further to develop a particular genre, e.g contemporary dance, it sometimes leave the indigenous practitioners stuck to a specific way of doing it even several years later, without necessarily knowing even why they do it in the first place.

It is a lock up of creativity. I started training as a dance with a group that specialized on contemporary dance. The challenge I felt was that the dance was abstract yet seeking meaning to every move. As much as it was poetic, I felt that it did not connect to my roots (as African) or possibly conveying the message about me or what I wanted to share with the audience. I also had reservation on a form of dance that claimed to be abstract, yet was quite recognizable in style.

What the trainer did when he realized this problem...he called in a traditional dance instructor. Together they took original moves and explored them further. This produced something quite contemporary yet quite relevant to me and my roots. I guess what I'm trying to say is: styles from overseas help us in terms of technique and ability to expand our creative capacity. But we should be encouraged to come up with our own content.

Contemporary theatre has also become traditional since it is done the same way. I cannot blame the donors who introduce such forms of art to us. But I can request that they do more research on how what they have can be helpful in the African content.

## **(7) The power of telling our own story**

*Author* : Rogers Otieno

*Activity* : Participation of Ghetto Radio at the forum hold during the Annual Earth Festival by the Gallmann Memorial Foundation on occassion of the post-election social turbulence in Kenya, January 2007.

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes

*Date and place* : October/ November 2009 | by e-mail

I happened to be working in a radio station called "Ghetto radio" as a presenter in 2007, during and after the post-election violence [in Kenya in December 2007-January 2008].

Kuki Gallmann and her daughter Sveva Gallmann, who manage a wildlife conservancy in Laikipia, were preparing for the Annual Earth Festival. This is a concert held at the hundred and five acre wildlife conservancy to encourage wildlife and environmental conservancy. At that time they decided they would also come out and be part of the solution to peace and reconciliation in the country before holding their annual festivals. Sveva contacted Ghetto radio for assistance and I mobilized youth from different towns in the country. Those who were actively involved and those who were victimized in the worst chaos in post-independency Kenya. Some of them were artists and others were employed and unemployed.

We then travelled to the Gallmann Memorial Foundation and went through a 5 days peace forum. To make the story short, the forum was so powerful that we came out with a performance piece which I directed. It was the first hip hop drama to be done in Kenya. We were surprised and honored to be informed that we were to curtain raise for the Annual event before an international audience. The group also recognizes the need for a strong bond and a body that would umbrella the different groups and bodies that were represented. That is how we came up with African Laikipia Peace Movement and I have been leading the organization ever since. Even though the hype ended and most promises from funders have not pulled through yet, we are able to encourage each other and keep up with the Arts and other entrepreneurial activities.

The event meant a lot to me because it proved that telling our own story really get guys listening and thinking our story as published in three local papers and three other abroad. We were also able to do, perform the piece in the ghettos that were affected by the violence.

The attention this story received was a sign of success. [African] conventional theatre is dominated by scripts that are not owned or are not easily identifiable by the practitioners in their lives. Therefore the chance given to young men and women from the ghettos to actually explain what happened in the PEV -because they are the ones who are there, and not CNN or Al Jazeera, really creates a confidence to them as performers.

I was happy to have directed the creative process. When we performed it in the ghettos, many residents had not seen anything like that [before]. It was basically seeing their behaviors in front of them as opposed to half-truths from the media. What changed, not completely but one could sense, was the realization that we were tricked by politicians to slaughter each other while we shared much more things in common than the ones we had as our differences.

Is it not the meaning of Art that feelings [are] expressed in style, to reflect on society and then, through that, make the society reflect on itself? If I had all the resources, I would sacrifice them for the group to travel and perform the hip-hop drama in every nation with a simmering election situation.

**CCA EA**

## **(8) Change of perception on what art is**

*Author* : Bertha Kang'Ong'Oi

*Activity*: Member of the audience at the Amnesia debate hold at Goethe Institut, October 2007; collaborator of the Amnesia Project organised by CCAEA (Centre of Contemporary Art East Africa).

*Story collected by*: Claudia Fontes

*Date and place:* October/November 2009, by e-mail

I am Bertha Kang'ong'oi, a freelance journalist based in Nairobi. I mainly write for newspapers and international websites about social injustice issues, about gender issues or I produce short documentaries about the same. But when I want to have a break from all the heaviness that often comes with journalism, I go to see art, talk with the artists and sometimes I even write about the art I see – and the artists I meet!

I first encountered CCAEA by chance. I had an appointment with Jimmy Ogonga to interview him about the Jo'Burg Art Festival which he had taken part in in 2007. ( I was writing the article for the African colours website). Instead of taking the intended one hour, we ended up talking for almost four hours! Jimmy had instead started explaining to me about his project called Amnesia. For me, this amnesia concept was something I would only have associated with in a philosophy class but not in what I perceived to be Kenyan art. He presented to me a whole new way in interpreting art. For many years, the art I had seen was very realistic and two dimensional – or sometimes three dimensional – but it was just a painting, or a carving and had no philosophy or ideology behind it.

Amnesia presented to me a kind of art that did not necessarily have form. It was an eye opener for me and made art all the more interesting and more engaging on an intellectual level. It bridged the gap that had existed – at least with many a Kenyan artist with his audience – where artists are expected to be ambiguous and not understood, a bit 'crazy'. The philosophy of art, as presented to me by the Amnesia concept meant that the art could be understood if not appreciated by the audience as much as by the artist.

I was involved in the Amnesia project both as part of an audience and as a partner involved in the project itself. As part of the audience, after my interview with Jimmy, he invited me to attend one of their presentations at the Goethe Institut in Nairobi. The art curator Simon Njami was presiding over the 'discussion'. It wasn't an exhibition of art as I would have expected but it was an exhibition of ideas. Through Amnesia, art was presented to me in a different way, as space and as a notion, an ideal, not necessarily a two-dimensional painting. This is the one particular event I can think of that opened my eyes to view art in this different way. The discussion centered on what was really African art. There were no objects to define African art – as had been and I believe still is most people's understanding of African art to be represented by objects, paintings or carvings. Instead, there were just ideas and philosophical questions asked to make the audience think of themselves and how they view themselves.

As a partner with Amnesia, I wrote a piece on the need of a cultural awakening in Africa, to appreciate art and never forget who we are. This piece was published in the second newsletter done by Amnesia – and which is on exhibition right now at the National Museum of Kenya.

Finally, I could see that art could be understood by the audience. In other words, art in this case was not an abstract painting that only made sense to the painter, art was an idea discussed and expressed by all people present in their own way.

## **(9) Change of attitude towards local music and musicians**

*Author :* Bertha Kang'Ong'Ooi

*Activity:* appreciation of Kenyan music as a consumer

*Story collected by:* Claudia Fontes

*Date and place:* October/November 2009, by e-mail

In regard to a most significant change I have experienced from a cultural or artistic event, I believe that has been from the Kenyan music scene. There has been a slow but sure revolution in the local music scene and like my experience with Amnesia and the change in my perception of art, the new musicians on the scene – like Susanna Owiyio, Atemi, Tony Nyadundo, Sauti Sol and Rateng – all have given me a new appreciation of my own culture- and the sound of it. It is finally easy to buy music done locally and it is well worth your money.

The meaningfulness of this to me is that we as a people are becoming self aware and accepting – or perhaps liking – who we are, both for the musicians and for their listeners who like their music because they identify with it. It is the only way to enrich our culture when we finally reach a critical mass of like-mindedness in regard to art and culture.

I changed my behaviour. I can now enjoy going to a local concert, paying for it and buying the CDs and appreciating the value I get for my money spent. This hasn't been the case for a long time. You see, Kenyans are exposed to a lot of international music- be it on radio and TV but also on the Internet. This has meant that our local musicians have had to up their game because in our perception they are competing with international artists. If I only had 1000 Kenya shillings (10euro), which can buy just one original CD, then I would have opted to buy something international, which I felt was value for my money. But that has changed and I would gladly spend the same amount of money to buy something done in my Kiswahili language and in good quality, music wise and production wise. Right now, some local musicians pull as much crowds as international artists visiting Kenya do. There is more appreciation because the music being made of a higher and international standard.

## **(10) Art as motivation: Overcoming isolation in East Africa**

*Author* : Miriam Rinck de Rubino

*Activity*: Member of the audience at the Amnesia debate organised by CCAEA (Centre of Contemporary Art East Africa) in 2008.

*Story collected by*: Claudia Fontes and Yvonne Owuor

*Date and place*: 19 October 2009, Nairobi, Kenya

I am a young Argentinean artist that has been living in Africa for the past 8 years, after living in different countries for shorter periods of time. My constant moving (that was due to personal circumstances, not out of choice) resulted in finding myself isolated from contemporary art trends in many of the countries where I lived. I think that this feeling of isolation had to do with, on one hand, a lack of infrastructure in many of the places I lived in, both in terms of internet technologies (to be able to communicate with the outside world) and in terms of spaces for intellectual discussion. Unfortunately, many artists in Africa had found similar experiences and had left overseas creating a drain in what we could term High Art and the intellectual exercise that accompanies it.

In this situation, I had found myself unmotivated and had eventually stopped developing my personal art projects. But this changed in 2008 when I assisted to the CCAEA-organized AMNESIA PROJECT in Nairobi, Kenya.

AMNESIA PROJECT provided a platform for open discussion that not only did not exist before in Kenya, but was also much needed.

The different platforms offered food for thought, an opportunity for networking, exposure to current art trends and the possibility of directly accessing a number of young successful artists that could serve as a model and inspiration for many.

The contributions from curator Simon Njami were invaluable at many levels. Kenyan art scene is lacking, among other things, from professional curators that can contribute to the art scene with insightful knowledge about art and critical thinking. Njami also provided strong historical and transnational references in his talks, making his presentations of value to anyone interested not only in arts, but also in national identity formation. Jimmy Ogonga, as an artist and organizer through the CCAEA, was instrumental in the choice of artists to showcase and in his planning of the themes of each platform as to be enriching for artist in different artistic disciplines and in a variety of issues.

Attending these conferences affected me in a big way:

-In terms of networking opportunities, I finally met a group of people that shared my interests and we exchanged ideas that eventually developed into art projects. I cannot stress enough how important this was for me.

Isolation is very detrimental for an artist's development. But most importantly, isolation is detrimental for the mental health of any human being. Being a foreigner in this country, I had been isolated from interactions in many opportunities. Even funding opportunities or career development opportunities in Kenya tend to focus on Kenyan/ African recipients exclusively, and in that case, of recipients that face extreme economic hardship. It is very difficult to find support for mid-level career artists. Not only my career was disrupted by moving from location to location until I finally settled in Kenya, but I had felt the effects of displacement and loss of roots, and the inability to find the right context in which I could thrive.

Since I had arrived, I had stopped my career, lost motivation, and had no support from a community of like-minded people. That unfortunately translated in a major depressive episode that lasted over a year.

Attending the AMNESIA platforms transformed my social and economic situation and helped me to go through the obstacles imposed by my illness, until I finally recovered from it.

How this happened?

-By offering a space for exchange of critical thinking, it pushed me to strive for a higher quality of works by developing stronger art concepts that are relevant not only to me, but to a varied audience.

-By inspiring me by showing examples of young artists that had developed high quality work even in situations where resources were scarce or places to show one's work were few. A self-starting spirit that is crucial for an artist working in developing countries.

The impact of AMNESIA resulted in:

I started to produce artwork again, and since then I have shown my work in several locations and I can say my life had been transformed not only through re-development of my career but also for the economic impact that being able to reach an audience and sell my artwork had. As a young person, becoming economically more independent had also an impact on my mental health and self esteem.

## **(11) Art really has social impact: Mapping the city and letting your voice be heard.**

*Author* : Miriam Rinck de Rubino

*Activity*: Urban Mirror, 2nd edition, July 2009

*Story collected by*: Claudia Fontes and Yvonne Owuor

*Date and place*: 19 October 2009, Nairobi, Kenya

Over the last few years, a couple of meaningful events had touched my life. I would like to mention the Harare International Festival of the Arts (HIFA) 2004 edition, some of the AMNESIA platforms, and Nairobi's Goethe Institute Urban Mirror (2nd edition, July 2009).

I could mention AMNESIA as probably one of the latest most meaningful artistic events I had experienced, and an explanation has been offered in my other story.

HIFA 2004 in Harare was meaningful to me in similar ways. Zimbabwe was going through severe financial difficulties at the time, and was also suffering from a cultural drain. It was touching to realize that despite all the economic and isolation obstacles faced, Zimbabweans offered a great show that tried not only to showcase the local talent, but also brought international artists together in a spirit of exchange of ideas and information.

Finally, Urban Mirror was a platform that reached both "low" and "high" art expressions and public from different backgrounds. There was Hip Hop artists and slum inhabitants, street dancers, poetry/dance/Afro-fusion music and performance/video art, public/ participatory art.

And this for me is a very important point. Nairobi is a very divided city, where inhabitants divide in terms of socio-economic classes, ethnic groups, nationalities and types of work. There exists different layers of communities where people interact in and within those layers, in an exchange of both cultural and economic levels, but this exchange is mostly horizontal, and vertical exchanges that cross the different layers are rare or very limited.

Most people that inhabit this city is not aware or cannot access information of what is happening in these others layers, be it in terms of art, lifestyles, or just simply what other people's ideas are.

Urban Mirror targets all layers of society by uniting them in one event and mapping them (on physical maps that allow knowledge of other artist's whereabouts and location of their studios), making the city of Nairobi a more interactive and easy-to-navigate place.

Finally, I would like to mention my own contribution to Urban Mirror, which I thought of as also meaningful, since it is connected to the effect that AMNESIA had on my artwork and on the issue of being able to create a platform for exchange of ideas:

My project was a questionnaire investigating general public reactions to what roles/responsibility of art institutions, governments, art scene players, and individuals themselves have in creating, developing and caring for spaces of self expression in the urban environment. The results were announced publicly during the event and presented as an art statement. This art piece was basically formed by what other people's messages were, and by the publishing and dissemination of that messages to other sectors of the society. The project provided an opportunity for participation, discussion and propagation of what the general population needs are, and these could be used -with further replication studies- to provide information to diverse players in the sector in order to supply the demands in the art market.

One more point that I would like to raise is that participating in the DOEN evaluation workshop had also a big impact on the way I look at the role of art projects in the community. It reconfirmed the importance of having an space for exchange of ideas and experiences that allow for people of different walks of life to gain information and exposure on what others are doing, how they do it, and the impact that art really has in the social space. Thank you so much for letting me be part of this experience.

## GODOWN ARTS CENTRE

### **(12) Pushed out of stage by strong desire to change the practices in the theatre industry**

*Author :* Dave Ojay

*Activity:* Stimulus from Joy Mboya, director of GoDown Arts Center, to apply to the Aga Khan Foundation Internship program "Leadership and management training for Young Development Professionals-Media, arts and culture, 2007/8"

*Story collected by:* Claudia Fontes and Yvonne Owuor

*Date and place:* 19 October 2009, Nairobi, Kenya

I started off as a journalist after graduating from a national Polytechnic. Later on I went into Performing arts and joined the theatre circle. After about three years of practice I managed to tour around East Africa in the name of theatre.

There was this feeling. Clearly something was pushing me out of the performing stage. I had a strong desire to change some practices in the industry but I didn't know how. This was greatly motivated after touring -with the support of the Dutch Embassy- the big musical Kigezi Ndoto through Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands in 2006. [Apart from performing], I always got the small responsibilities of taking care of costumes & props, ensuring stage and equipments are in order, be the leader of the group. I decided to go behind the scenes and try impacting the changes I had thought vital, especially with regard to artists and production management standards. I didn't like the way I was being treated as an artist, but when I went for this international festival the grade of how things were being managed was a little bit higher. And that alone also moved me, and I felt like, maybe I should try as much as possible, and also do both of them [be an artist and a manager]. Then in trying to do both of them I realized that I was undermining some of the tasks on one side. Then I thought: "if I become a performer and a manager, I'm not really able to concentrate on the roles I get on stage". So that's when I decided to hand down the stage stuff and strictly become a manager or an administrator.

I was involved in several productions thereafter that gave me a professional status and increasingly made a name for me as a diligent, creative, daring, multitasking and unusual productions/stage manager.

I was involved first with the GoDown when I was Stage Managing one of Kenya's most powerful musical [play] written by great Kenyan music artist Eric Wainaina; this event made me get closer to the GoDown. It was during a relevant discussion that the top management advised me to apply for an internship program (Leadership and management training for Young Development Professionals-Media, arts and culture, 2007/8) that they were involved in together with the Aga Khan Foundation. I always wanted to build artistic professional skills for myself and improve the way I interact and be part of the development and change agents in the industry including the society by passing on acquired skills and creating opportunities. Fortunately I went through the interview and was picked in the training program together with another 20 East Africans. They created this enormous post that I didn't understand at the first time. I was attached as a Programs Coordinator and Audience Development officer at the GoDown. Slowly I started getting this 'official' artistic look, attending meetings, coming up with strategies, developing an execution plan for an event, [being in charge of ] backstage management, front of house management, the whole event entirely.

While undertaking the training I had one of the greatest times in the world of creativity. It was during a community festival in four communities that I helped to put together that I learnt more than just management skills from talent nurturing, art for economic development for people from less fortunate backgrounds, creative ways of life, diversity, cultivating audience development through outreach and giving art a certain value for sustainability. My capacity was well built and developed just as I had always wanted. How significant was this initiative that it provided me with the means to the end?

It was an opportunity that made me look at things differently, and it was an opportunity that I think made me even become better in the dreams I had, providing artists with the best services and things, you know, becoming original, creative, unique, all those things that come with creativity.

Slowly after the graduation of that training, I found myself working with Sarakasi. After that, I was presented with a job offer from another organization that is also funded by Doen, Africa Unsigned, to become the coordinator in Eastern and Southern Africa. It's something that has really made me look at personal development, with such critical sight... once you've started there's no going back, to the extent that I and some of my friends, we sat down and we thought, let's look at our future industry, what does it really look like? And together with some very fine, powerful artists in the local industry we were able to form a partnership theatre production company that we run together, called Undone Theatre Projects.

It is one of the few theatre entrants that stands out as authentic, unique, behaviour changing and influencing, professional and truly local/African theatre. Our policy is strictly to do African regional productions; we've done two productions already, and we set our own standards. For a show we don't pay our artists less than 2000 a show, so if you have 3 shows in a day that means the artists take home 6000. I think the first public show I did I was given 500 bob for a show, it didn't even pay me back my transport money. I'm grateful that the things I used to see going on in the artists' lives that I wanted to change are changing, because at first I didn't know why I had this desire, to do management, but it was pushing in me so strongly, that I yielded to that push.

The downside of it is that sometimes I wish I were the performer now, with all the facilities and expertise I am able to offer to the performers these days.

### **(13) It only takes me and you**

*Author* : Dave Ojay

*Activity*: Performance at 'Kegezi Ndoto' and stage manager for 'Lwanda, A Ghetto Story'.

*Story collected by*: Claudia Fontes and Yvonne Owuor

*Date and place*: 19 October 2009, Nairobi, Kenya

Most events have always just entertained, little inspired and raised issues people face. There are two most successful powerful musical shows that have done more than just that to me.

Though I was involved in these productions as a performer and as a production team member (Stage Manager), -Kegezi Ndoto and Lwanda, A Ghetto Story respectively-, they made some major contribution to the quality of my life and others who were involved or watched.

These cultural activities have been significant to the extent that they have helped to shape the person I am today both professionally and as a person. Avoiding the complaining corner and trying to leave my environment better than I found it and influencing others to increase the link.

Kigezi Ndoto was a story of the African Hooks and Dreams. Colonialists came and went, we had our heroes, they did their part. We won and quickly lost it all because of selfishness and greed. We lost the hooks to reach our dreams. Each and every one of us has to think and act. We all have a part to play. This continent has done well and can do much better and be a great success story.

On the other hand Lwanda is a modern rendition of a traditional myth set up in a slum. After our leaders became what they are well known for, we were left to survive but not to live. People eating people -allow me to put it that way because I lack the words. Where is the just society where we can all live a prosperous quality life, highly humane as never?

Its time to do something right from the grass roots for ONE DAY change will catch up with everyone. It may take more than a decade and we may not be there to witness the fruits of collective efforts, but however slow it may be, victory will be realised. It is eminent because it only takes me and you!

## **(14) I didn't believe in art**

*Author :* Raphael Omondi

*Activity:*

-Meeting to develop a strategy plan for the Ministry of Youth in Taita-Taveta, Kenya, 2007.

-Partnership with GoDown Arts Center to develop 'Dunda Mtaani' in Kibera. GoDown supported Pamoja Youth Foundation both technically and financially.

*Story collected by:* Claudia Fontes and Yvonne Owuor

*Date and place:* 19 October 2009, Nairobi, Kenya

I am 21 years old, the fifth born in a family of 9. I just finished my form level in 2006. I live in Kibera and I am the founder of Pamoja Youth Foundation in the slum. The reason why I started this organisation is that I wanted to create changes that I would love to see.

I am not an artist, I can't even dance, but I've been involved in art and culture for a while now. The most significant change [I can point out] in me is [a change of] attitude, and the change of [the] system.

[Where I come from], we believe if you want to make a change, then you have to pass the exams; that's the culture I used to believe in, and I used to work very hard to make sure that I get it right. When I finished primary school, I passed very well, but I couldn't go to high school because of funds. My dad couldn't pay for me, he paid for a lot of family problems. I came to Nairobi when I was 13 years old from Nyanza, from a place called Uwai.

I was very small, I was very [much a] kid, and short. After one week I was taken to a construction site to work there. Fortunately when I got to the construction site there was this Indian man, the site manager, who came like: – "Hey! You can't work here, you are too young, go to school". He gave me 5000 shillings and told me: 'don't come here again, go back'. I thought: "-OK, I can't work, I can't go to school, so what now?". [That mandate] that only through school I could make it in life was still in me, so I bought some pair of trousers and a white shirt, and I didn't even pay for them, I told them it was to go to school. Then I just walked into a school, I talked to the principal, I said 'Hey, this is my exam slip, and I believe I can make it. If you give me a chance, I'll prove you wrong'. This guy actually let me in, and I was good, I managed to be amongst the top ten, so the principal was like 'Hey, you can do it'. He allowed me to do some manual work at school to pay for my fee, and then I got into this human rights thing, that nowadays I do.

Because of past experiences, I couldn't talk to a policeman, they were like enemies, whenever I saw a policeman it was like, I should stole this guy, because they used to come to our home, tease my mum, so I was like 'Hey, what's up with these guys?'. So when I got into this human rights thing, like being arrested and those things, it came as a taboo to me: every year I had to spend some hours in jail, so I had no doubt in that. A lot of issues would happen, guys would call me: "-Hey where are you? Do you know this and this [is

happening]?”. Then I asked myself, why is it that if anything happens in Nairobi, it either starts or ends in Kibera, and when there is a problem in Kibera, they just consult me: “-Raphael, are you safe? Where are you?”; even the media guys are like “Hey, are you safe?”. So I thought I should do something, and that’s how I founded the Pamoja Youth Foundation. Pamoja Youth Foundation actually unites people in Kibera, to provide a voice for them. Now it’s not Raphael anymore, let us talk as brothers and sisters, if there’s something wrong we go to the street.

When there’s violence, when people want to meet their political aspirations, they always come to Kibera, looking for young people to cause havoc; when the civil society want to push for something, they always come to Kibera to fish for young people. At the end of it all they don’t come clearly and say: “-Yes, I went to Kibera to take some few young people to come and cause havoc within the civil”. They always come and blame the same people they used. So we say, ok we have to change, and sometimes I got it very rough in Kibera, [I get a lot of] “hey, this guy’s being sponsored by so and so”. But also there’s a call for change on my side, and also for the community. Because if you go to Kibera today, there’s a lot of money that’s coming to Kibera, everybody’s talking to Kibera, but why is it that instead of the situation in Kibera improving, it’s actually worsening? Why they don’t go to Mathare? The answer is very simple. If you have very many NGO’s doing the same thing, there’s always nothing happening. Most of the NGO’s, 98% of them are health-based, they mainly deal with HIV and Aids. Nobody is talking about economical empowerment, nobody’s talking about the political empowerment in Kibera, so I realized that unless we start doing things differently [nothing will change]; then now it’s the time we have to change.

When I started Pamoja Youth Foundation, then there were a lot of questions still coming out of my mind: we now have the youth group here, we don’t have money, and everyone was pushing me: “-Unless we don’t do an HIV programme, we won’t have money, that’s a great way to get money”, or : “-Unless we do art, to get money, [we won’t have any money]”; but to me art was nowhere in my mind. I couldn’t listen to music, every day I was reading books.

At that time I met Judy Ogana from Godown in 2007 in Taita Taveta and we went to do a strategic plan for the ministry of Youth. She was doing this presentation and I was like:- “Ah, ok: so art can do this”. So after we came back, Judy called me: “-Hey, Raphael, can you visit me in my office?” I went there, we talked, she said: -‘Can we work with you guys together?’. They came to Kibera to do ‘Dunda Mtaani’ and everybody was like: “-Hey, we are going to see this show, we know these guys, they’ve been doing this and this. Even my friends were: -“ We have to go to that function, I have to perform”. So I realized that art can actually change the community. When I started the radio station in Kibera, Pamoja FM, [I thought] “if we can’t get the politicians [here], then they have to listen to this radio station. We also had issues coming up, guys saying: – “Hey, this radio station is owned by Luhya”, Nubians saying this radio station is ours, so I had a lot of community problems with my radio station (see editor note below). But after Dunda Mtaani came in 2007 , I was like: “Ok, I still have a problem with the police; what can I do?”

At that time I was working with the United Nations under the KenSAP for the Slum Upgrading programme, so I got the chance to go to Rio, in Brazil. When I went to Brazil I saw they had this samba festival and everything, and those guys were trying to come up with an initiative of young people and police, so when I met these guys they had the same experience than me, with young people, shared the experience in this human activism thing. So when we were there, [we thought], ‘you have to do something with the police, and the only way we can get them is through art’. So they formed a committee, they wanted a chair of the committee, and I chaired it. When I was chairing the committee they had to meet the police and work things out.

So when I came back, I wanted to do the same. Wherever I go there’s this art, art, art! But for me I didn’t believe in art, it was just like... ‘if you’re idle, you sing; if you are not, then you do your own stuff’. But then I said to myself: -‘you have to change your attitude, you have to change your perception and do something’. So, we had our first show in Brazil in 2007, with young people and police on the street doing their own thing, and I thought- ‘hey, this thing can work!’ And it was all over the media. When I came back, again I was asked- ‘Raphael, you have to do something for Kenya’. So, I thought, what can we do? Then I came up with the same concept, on a street festival.

Right now what I’m trying to do is talking to the police and young people, and provide a platform for both of them, to do art together. Luckily enough this year I started the initiative, it’s called The Street Festival, I’ve got the police doing hip-hop on the street, we’ve got the police dancing on the street, and I’ve got young people doing it with them. Beyond my attitude change, I’ve also seen the community changing. People can

now go and talk to the police, because in Kibera we used to have one belief, that all the police believed that every young person on the street was a criminal unless proved innocent, and to us it used to be every policeman is an enemy unless he or she proved to be part of us.

So when we started this art initiative down there in Kibera every month, we have guests coming from other places, we have other people coming from different parts. Amongst them the United Nations, through the Safer Cities programme, came and asked: “-Can you take this initiative to other places?”. So we started moving to different places, and having the police down there training in rap music in police uniforms, so that the community can see that these are policemen. Now we have young people dancing with them, they formed a troupe. We’ve got a lot of challenges because the police depend on me. They say: “we can do it, but you have to provide the necessary [logistics]: they need to be safe and we also have to provide financially for them.

Currently I’m working on a bigger festival in February, the Nairobi street festival. For this festival we’re also going to bring together the soldiers from Brazil who are involved in hip-hop, and the police who are doing the same on the streets of Nairobi. We will also get some friends from Colombia because the UN Safer Cities programme works in different countries all over the world, and of all the initiatives, they have actually identified the street festival as the best tool [for social change]. Also the government of Kenya is actually co-organizing the initiative: the minister of the local government, the Ministry of Nairobi Metropolitan Development, the office of the prime minister and the Minister of Internal Security they’re now joining in.

For instance last Tuesday I made a forum with them, discussing the event. I hope it’s maybe God working, or maybe something’s happening somewhere, that the minister for local government agreed to give us a platform within the city council: every month we will be having art, the Nairobi’s festival is going down, we will have the police involved, the young people involved, we will also have seminars. If you can do something, like writing, because I write, I do graffiti, [you will join in and try] and see if this can actually change something, can act as a tool for crime and violence prevention within the town. I hope it will be a good event.

And this is why I was somehow confused when you asked me about my experience with art. I thought: -‘I’ve never sung, I’ve never danced samba, I don’t have talent in this field’, but my experience... I always go to Judy and say thank you very much, you really, really helped me, because to me, if I needed something from, for example, the government, I used to be a person who would storm the office and say ‘I need to see this person’ if you said he’s not there I would ask you at what time he would be back. I couldn’t wait, if he was there I had to meet him. But now I’m a bit more relaxed. I say, if I can’t get him, it’s ok. But it’s through the art that I have changed my attitude; [now I understood] that’s it’s not only me, that the people can also speak.

Now I am starting a five-year programme; within the five years we want to go through East Africa, but targeting mainly 6 towns, 3 in Kenya, 2 in Uganda and 2 in Tanzania, [doing the same thing we are doing in Nairobi]. If you have these soldiers [like the soldiers in Uganda], some of them they do music in schools, but immediately after they join the forces, and that dream is dead. So they keep asking me: – ‘Raphael, we need to do this, we need to make art...’ But hey, I don’t have money, but we keep on going, doing this initiative and we hope that in partnership with other organisations, we will be able to make it happen too. Because one of the things I’m trying to do, when we get it done, is to [be able to] identify every month a team of young people and police to do a joint artwork together and look for funding, and say: -‘Ok, go do this, go do that stuff in this recording studio’. Then we could have a team of guys who could try to push for this music, push for this stuff, so even more people can see that there’s no more conflict between the youth and the police culture. That is my aim, and I hope, if I can achieve it, then God will have liberty to take me into heaven.

**Note of the editor:**

*Kibera has a violent history of ethnic and religious conflict. Five of Kenya’s six largest ethnic groups (Kikuyu, Kisii, Luo, Luhya, and Kamba) call Kibera “home.” The Nubians (a Sudanese Muslim group that first settled Kibera after being recruited to fight on behalf of the British in World War I) claim land tenure rights to the slum. Kibera has experienced several intense, bloody ethnic clashes between these groups. In each case of collective violence in Kibera, the combatants were predominately unemployed youth, aged 16-30 years.*

## **(15) I can't pay you one million shillings but you can get knowledge**

*Author* : Julius Lugaaya

*Activity*: Residency for performers at GoDown Arts Centre.

*Story collected by*: Claudia Fontes

*Date and place*: 21 October 2009, Kampala, Uganda

My name is Julius Lugaaya, I'm a Ugandan, East African. I've got two experiences to tell- one in dance, the other in theatre and drama. In the year 2000 we took a bold trip to Nairobi to do a theatre show because we thought we had captured Uganda, we wanted to go and see what happens on our own. We did a performance in Nairobi, the attendance was not good but we achieved it. We were there for four days, and then we came back home. When we came back home, we were invited to take part in a residency in Nairobi for 8 weeks, which took place at the GoDown Arts Centre. We met different dancers from Africa, we exchanged, we shared.

Of course, in your first international travel you meet people whose passports are full of visas and your passport has either two visas or one visa, [while] somebody has two passports and they're full and you're like 'oh, ok'. It's an inspiration, but also you're like 'are we working hard [enough]?' So through that network I created a dance forum in Uganda, and my job has been to inspire people who are trying to stand out in the art-field, any performing artist, especially people who go to university.

There was a time when people were afraid to say 'I'm doing MDD (Music, Dance and Drama course at Makerere University)'. My job was to inspire these people [explaining to them] that you can have a future, you can live [out of the arts]; it's up to your creativity, your energy, your time and your teamwork.

[Through the networks I created thanks to] the Godown Arts Centre I created a forum called the "Dance Week" which is going to be running for the sixth edition next year. New companies have come up, new dancers have come up, there is today a craze of hip-hop, popping, street dancing [that came up from the Dance Week forum].

After [my residence in] Godown I had a chance to go to Moscow for another residence where I attended a festival. [The festival's organizers] asked me 'what are you going to do when you go back home?' I said 'when I go home I will start a project called Dance Week', and they told me 'what is Dance Week? What are you going to do?' I said I would invite people, art practitioners, we would meet, we would share, we would showcase, workshop, basically we would know each other, so we can make dance become a strong form in this country. All this happened because thanks to the contact at Godown, I could go to Moscow, [and then came into] this huge network.

It means a lot to me [to be able to facilitate this network to others], because if you look at the history of dance in this country... I happened to have gone to a school where dance was part of the menu, and the unfortunate bit was that people were dancing, but when they finished [school] they didn't practice professionally. Of course, these were the future lawyers, the future doctors, the future vets and all that. But I was part of that team that came out and was going to stand up for dance. So at GoDown I found a lot inspiration and believing that there wasn't there before.

When I was in school there used to be something called the Ugandan Dance Council. We used to come and do shows at the theatre, where they would invite different additional groups from various parts of the country. In our school we used to have a creative dance festival, and they used to take the best three out of the other disciplines like the solos, the duos, the group dance and the trios. So we used to showcase at the National Theatre for a weekend. But then this project didn't have an owner, so it kind of collapsed because Father Grahams headed it but he left and there was nobody to run the project.

So this other forum was the first kind of dance forum where you get artists from Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, and Congo to come and showcase.

If you look at Africa, there is West Africa, South Africa and the Arab world. But East Africa is just there, we don't have an identity. When you go to other particular festivals and somebody comes on stage, you can tell if he/she is from West Africa, or from the south, or from the Arab world. But in East Africa, we tend either to copy, or we are not original, or we have not got time to showcase, or we don't believe in what we do, or we

are not inspired enough. When all these people came [together, at the Dance Week], they noticed there was something different. You could tell most choreographers wanted to come and do something here, because there was something new, something they hadn't experienced before.

When more works are produced they tend to create an identity, they tend to call for headlines. So I think, when you look at the West [Africa], they have a certain style when they dance, and that also comes from the traditional bit of it. You may find that people in the East [Africa] tend to dance either with the waist, either with their arms, either with their feet, so you can identify. There are certain changes and dynamics that make us to be unique. In the South [Africa], we can say they've gone through a lot, I think the apartheid created a certain identity with them, the pain, and sometimes people say in East Africa we haven't suffered, that people take things for granted, because there's not that pain to create a force. In Kenya they talk a lot about the East African identity, the Kenyans have this bit of branding, they brand themselves a lot, but here we receive and throw. In Uganda, either we copy, or copy half-way, or we don't copy or try at all.

Also after being to the Godown, Aloyce Makonde, a dancer in Tanzania created a festival, Visa 2 Dance. I think it's running for the last two years now, they've just finished an edition. He came to Uganda to attend one of the dance festivals and got inspired. Now he has started a forum in Tanzania. They are also going to start another festival in Kenya, I think they want to call it 'Solos and Duets'.

At first it is very hard to believe that you can do something. First of all, there is the issue of funding- it is the worst, because you never know the right procedures because each person tells you different things. There are lots of forms to fill, you must have a bank account, you must have a so-called board of trustees, it is a hell of a thing to do. So when I did this forum, first I used my own money, and friends through networking, people you know, and then getting spaces for free. And I saw it works, because you find that other projects survive on donors, in order to survive they must apply for funds. Then two months before the festival they are still panicking, nobody has replied. Then if they are lucky, two weeks before the festival they see the money has come through, so they start working.

But with Dance Week, I explain to people that it's a new thing, it's our thing, it's not my thing, so we both need to put in. Actually I explained to the artists, I said 'do not expect money, but in the future you never know what can come out of this small forum for you, because: one, you're going to get a chance to showcase your works; two, you're going to meet people; three, you're going to share with the people; four, people are going to know you'.

I told Aloyce: 'I can't pay you one million shilling but you can get knowledge that you are going to use, and which is worth it more than the money I'm going to give to you'. So now other people got inspired and they have started running festivals, which we didn't have before, I think that's a great thing.

## KWANI ?

### (16) Eva the writer

*Author* : Eva Kasaya

*Activity*: Kwani publishing and editing of her memoirs

*Story collected by*: Claudia Fontes and Yvonne Owuor

*Date and place*: 19 October 2009, Nairobi, Kenya

My parents moved us from Thika to the village in Kerongo, our homeland, when I was about five. They worked as migrant labourers in a coffee plantation. My uncle never liked us because now our small garden he used to cultivate was being taken away by my parents. Since my dad had only three daughters and no son, he had no power against his brother. Infact he feared his brother and his wife too. His brother lived in the village and knew how to survive. In fact he owned five livestock and could weave baskets. With his large family he could feed his 10 children. Being too proud to have sons, he controlled everything. He would come

to steal a piece of out land by moving fences. Since my dad had gone back to town, it was only my mother to struggle with her in-law, by getting assistance from the village men. To that extent, my uncle one day abused my mother. Due to that, I have grown up to dislike my uncle and his wife but get along with my cousins.

My dad got retrenched when I was still in lower primary, all of his money was spent to build my mother a semi-permanent house, the one we lived in was grass-thatched and during the rainy season, it used to get soaked water. My parents did their best to see me at least through primary level. After that I got stuck. I couldn't attend high school due to lack of school fees. I left to work as a house girl. My friend knew the city well and she agreed to take me to work for her sister when I was sixteen. Travelling with her to Nairobi through train, with half the money she stole from her boyfriend. The night before travelling, my friend asked me to take her to her boyfriend to bus fare; reaching there, not only he was there one but two boys. It was an organized thing. Once there the boys insisted on sex. There was a call for them to go and fix music system at the funeral place. Before they got back to sleep with us, we had already sneaked out of the window with their cash. At the station, she also had a cop boy-friend who she sorted our travel expenses with him in exchange for sex in the train to Nairobi. I worked for very different people but my last employer was really kind. She gave me a chance to learn dressmaking. After that she gave me 5,000 shillings and parted. Unfortunately I had no money for food and other things for making a living. Also the money was little for renting and buying fabric for business and I just finished it up.

Before I left my last employer I met Renate, a white German lady whom we become good friends through my boss. She came to find him one day instead she found me and since she visited me always and was curious to know what Kenyan house-girls do and what made them chose to work. Once I told her my child story she was really inspired to that extend and asked if I could write it down for her. So one night after I did my dishes for the evening, I took out a small book I had taken from the child in the house, and I started writing. And I wrote for 3 days, it had some very strong meaning for me. I did in a small notebook; to my amazement she told me it could be a big book if I got it published.

I met Annette [Majanja], a former Kwani? employee whom I submitted my small booklet kind of my daily diary. Kwani? had just started searching for local writers and my small booklet just fitted in. Once Binyavanga [Wainaina], the executive editor had looked at it, he liked it even though it was done poorly and short, and promised a big look out of it.

Binyavanga introduced me to Jacqui Lebo as my editor. Kwani? has really positioned me up in writing skills by hiring an editor to work with me on the memoir. Jacqui has also done a big favour by giving me books to read and also she has been helping me to expand my writing. I didn't know editing a book was that hard. I would write a sentence like 'I used to have fun in the river' and she would tell me:- 'Eva, I want you to describe this river, you write about the river and what you used to have, and I want 6 full stops'. And that's how I ended up finding writing more interesting. When it kicks in my mind, I need to put it down quickly. And then, because I was poor in the computer, I would take it to someone to type it for me, and then I would submit it, that's how we've been going through it.

All these thanks to Kwani? They also sponsored me to attend the Summer Literary Seminars. It was very interactive and I met famous writers like the editor of Transition magazine Mr. Bucks, Kenya famous writers like Marjorie, Barrack Muluka among others. Kwani? also had the reading every 2nd Tuesday of the month and I attended once in a while; due to late hours I could not manage due to security although the ones I attended helped me meet famous poets like Bantu, Smitten, Caro Nderitu and many other upcoming poets whom Kwani? gave chance to show and tell their talents. Even musicians are not locked out: Maumau, Ukoo Fulani, Inyo and others. I think that is how Kwani? is helping young upcoming artists. Due to all that I have learnt a lot not only by writing a memoir. I've written children storybooks, and submitted some, yet to get replies.

Before I met Kwani? I had worked as a house-help for many years and life was not as easy, as I have been mistreated by some. I met Kwani? and Binyavanga offered to pay me a book advance which helped me big times. I was expecting a child and jobless. I was able to set a tailoring shop at Kangemi. I wasn't doing badly at all until our last election. Commodities prices went high and life became hard especially when there were fears of circulation of papers about Mungiki wanting ten heads of Luhya, twenty of Luo, that I got scared and moved up country where I am living with my sister. I still do tailoring but it is not as paying as before.

The book has taken 3, almost 4 years to be done. It's coming out soon now, though. Because Binyavanga believed in me and I believed in him, the book is actually going to be a 200-page book now. I am hoping to get the sales from my book to get my education and writing more stuff. I can still get high school education.

I'm not that old, and I can get that chance where I am now. And you know how education can really polish you up.

### **(17) One foot into the “writers club”**

*Author* : Samuel Munene

*Activity*: Poetry competition "To Be A Man", organised by Kwani?

*Story collected by*: Claudia Fontes

*Date and place*: October/November 2009, by e-mail

There are a number of things that I always wanted to achieve, and I knew them clear since my childhood. Not that just I sat and wrote them down, but they were clearly defined in my head. Achieving these things would give me fulfillment, satisfaction and a sense I have done something useful in these world. Not achieving them wouldn't harm me but then I would live with a gap in my life.

Becoming a good writer and having a little influence on the cultural direction was some of the things I wanted to achieve. I never got a chance to train as a writer, having taken a BA (Economics) degree at the University. Meanwhile I wrote poetry, I wrote fiction, and non-fiction essays. But they didn't see the light of the day. Some were of poor quality; some I just didn't know how to get them out.

I knew of Kwani?, I read their publications, and followed up on most of their activities. But whenever I asked if they would be interested in my writing the answer was “just e-mail them to us”. I never got a response. The big break came in 2007. By that time I was done with my university education and was on the streets earning a living selling computers. Around August of that year Kwani? announced a poetry competition. The theme was “To Be A Man”. I did participate and in November, when they announced the winners, I emerged the second runners up and bagging \$500. The money of course was of use but the most important thing to me was at least having one foot in the “writers club”.

In December of the same year I was invited by Kwani? to participate in a workshop whose purpose was to train writers to go out there in the field and bring back “real election stories”. The money was not much, but the chance to participate in such an exercise was enough reward for me. What I brought back, a story about Mwea, was accepted by the editors and subsequently I did some work for Kwani? in 2008.

But still I needed to earn a living and Kwani? wasn't paying me immediately for some of the work I did for them. So I had to hustle here and there, sell my computers and other stuff. But things started opening up. The editors at Kwani? started referring me for other jobs for other organizations; they also started calling me for their own research jobs.

I now work part time for Kwani? as an editorial assistant. I don't fully earn my living from it, but the chance to work with some of the best editors is great, the opportunity to work with some of the brightest minds is wonderful. I won't stick there forever, but wherever I go after Kwani? I will be a very much improved person, in my writing, in how I view things and in my thinking. Kwani? has helped accelerate this.

**PENYA/Up to you too**

### **(18) Touring Europe with The New East African Sound**

*Author* : Adeline Maranga

*Activity*: 'The New East Africa Sound' european tour organised by Penya in The Netherlands, Sweden and Britain.

*Story collected by*: Claudia Fontes

*Date and place*: October/November 2009, by e-mail

My name is Dela. The most significant change I experienced as an artist was in August / September 2009 when I was part of a tour dubbed "The New East African Sound" [organised by Penya]. It was a thirty-six day tour, with over twenty shows in Europe, in The Netherlands, Britain, and Sweden.

I am glad I got to experience this because it helped me to grow tremendously, both as a musician and as a person. I got to experience and appreciate another culture, so different from my own. My stage performance skills became better and better with every show, because I had to make the audience feel my music when they did not understand the language.

And. . . I had a fantastically great time on tour :)

## **(19) A learning journey**

*Author* : Moses Aluda

*Activity*: Training and working experience in Penya

*Story collected by*: Claudia Fontes

*Date and place*: October/November 2009, by e-mail

In Penya I have learned a lot and gained skills in Audio recording and Sound engineering, both rounded off as Music Production. Most of my production skills have been gained while working closely with other more experienced Producers like Wawesh and NikPunk. These guys are big time and they have really taught me the essence of learning how to work with different artists during the many studio sessions that we've had. This in turn has developed my communication skills and has given me the opportunity to learn how to guide other recording artists during their recording sessions in order to bring out the best in them.

Working at Penya has also improved my IT Skills because I'm always faced with the challenge of learning something new whenever I'm setting up the internet data base and/ or working with new software programs. I'm also learning a lot about administration work while helping other staff find solutions to challenges that they are faced with. Being a technical guy, I find it a little bit challenging to write out the minutes of a meeting that we've just had or type out programs of upcoming events, however with the help of Franka Verheul, this has been transformed into a worthwhile experience for me. The more I do it, the easier it becomes. Franka is phenomenal!

With the introduction of the In-House Program, where we develop upcoming artists, I have learned how to take charge and train the students on the concepts of music through teaching, mentoring and developing their artistic side in a way that brings out the best in them and in turn opens up doors for them to become our next great future generational singers.

All in all, the experience I have had has made me a better person, gaining me vast knowledge, becoming wiser and knowing when and how to make the right decisions in life, and this has been and continues to be very meaningful to me.

## **SARAKASI TRUST**

### **(20) My second chance**

*Author* : Jeffrey Rahim Otieno

*Activity*: Contact made through Sarakasi Trust for a post with Dubbelleuk Foundation as a Project Assistant.

*Story collected by*: Claudia Fontes and Yvonne Owuor

*Date and place*: 19 October 2009 | Nairobi, Kenya

My name is Jeffrey Rahim Otieno, Programs Officer – Events Management with Sarakasi Trust. I am 30 years of age and joined the Organization in early 2005 as a Project Assistant. Prior to this I was a musician with the Jomenes Boys na Band group and an aspiring Events Organizer. To be included in the organization of the annual festivals and other events at Sarakasi Trust has been a real eye opener and has exposed me to skills I otherwise would never have experienced:

-I am a much better Event Programmer/organizer as a result of this exposure.

-In addition the income I generate at Sarakasi has enabled me to fend for myself and my family. This has consequently made me a more responsible husband and father.

-I successfully kicked off a drinking and smoking habit and my duties at Sarakasi continue to keep me focused.

From all these changes, the most significant for me is the one related to my family.

I go back to the birth of my son. When Jerome was conceived I was going through a really rough patch. I didn't have a job... To cut a very long story short, I was not doing very well. I didn't have a roof above my head and yet she was expecting a baby, this was in late 2004.

I had met Rudy and Marion before [Rudy and Marion van Dijck, founders of Sarakasi Trust]. But when I met Rudy later in early 2005, that's when our meeting became very significant. I always see it as a turning point in my life because I opened up to him, I told him what I was going through, and I came to see him to see if there was anything I could help with in Sarakasi. Unfortunately there wasn't, for a while there was nothing, there was no available post for me. But as I kept pushing and we were discussing, they introduced me to another platform called Dubbelleuk, who were looking for someone to do artwork in Nairobi schools in the slums. Yet I was cutting with the notion of being an artist, a musician, and the only option available was for something related to event management. I didn't have much choice. I threw myself into it; they wanted to try me for a month to see if I was up to the task. After a month, they took me on as an assistant. This was almost in March. My position was, of course, I didn't have a house, I was in debt... and within two months my son was arriving, he was due in May.

I keep taking it back to the birth of my son, because within two months so much changed for me. By the time he was born I was in a much more stable position, I was much more confident of being able to fend for my wife and my son, and had already made a trip to Holland, out of my wildest dreams, I didn't think it could happen that fast! I was a totally different person within these two months of my getting in contact with Sarakasi and the birth of my son. So to me, meeting Rudy at the end of 2005 and the arrival of my son in May are the two most significant events cause to me it shows me how much, how far I came. When he was born I think I was much more clear in my mind towards where I was heading, which no longer involved music, but becoming an event organiser.

From the background of being an artist I believe I have a lot of insight as to how artists expect an event promoter to treat them, what they expect when you are inviting them for an event. How they expect to be treated. There were artists at Sarakasi who came in when I was there and I could relate to them, I could tell where they want to go with their careers. To me I saw myself as a bridge between these directors who are not really in touch with what the people want, and the artists themselves. I spent lots of time interacting with the artists, telling them 'we are trying to make things better for you', 'where do you want to be heading?' Two years later I could see successful stories which to me were really encouraging. I could facilitate that change and to me that was very important. My drive to get into events management was to have this done right for the artists.

The trip to Holland triggered this passion I have now as an event organiser.

The Dubbelleuk Foundation works with underprivileged kids in Holland, kids dealing with drugs and violence, homeless kids. This organisation every year they hold an event for kids. They put up a big event where these kids just come and mingle with other kids of similar backgrounds and they get good entertainment, they actually bring big artists in Holland and then they give them some food, just one big party. This was the event I was attending in 2005. And there are two aspects to this. First the way all the event was well adjusted, flawless, very well organised. This is when my passion in event management actually [kicked in]. I was getting more and more attracted to their way of doing things, everything goes around the clock.

And then, the second aspect of touching these kids' hearts. You could see how much at the end of the day... You could see hope in their faces, how seeing these artists performing had provoked in them the desire to thrive and be someone, and not to conform to what society is trying to make them believe they are. To me that is really special. Ten months later we did something similar in Nairobi. We cooked and there were performances and you could see the same passion, when you give someone a second insight into what they could be.

My life is all about second chances, seconds shots at life. As a musician I was living a good life and I wasted it... and then I got my second shot. So, relating with these people, being in a position where I relate to people who are trying to pick themselves up, people who are trying to make something out of their lives... I wouldn't have it in another way. I think God put me in the perfect place so that I have to keep reminding myself of my past. I am surrounded by people who are going through situations I've gone through. I am in an environment where I am constantly reminded of where I am from and what needs to be done for other people like me.

I am most grateful for the second opportunity Sarakasi Trust has accorded me to pursue my dreams and live a more meaningful life.

## **(21) You don't choose to be born in the slums**

*Author* : Sylvester Odour Ondiege

*Activity*: Sarakasi Trust training programme and outreach programme in the slums from 2003 on.

*Story collected by*: Claudia Fontes and Yvonne Owuor

*Date and place*: 19 October 2009 | Nairobi, Kenya

My name is Sylvester Odour Ondiege, I am a dancer, acrobat and drummer, above all I am married with two children. I was brought up in the slums in Korogocho.

As a young and talented artist I managed to attend various dance, acrobatic and music sessions to help me get off the streets, improve my talent and to add to my skills, since the age of 10, courtesy of Sarakasi Trust.

My journey as artist started in November 2003 when I joined Sarakasi Trust as trainee under an intense training program. My parents didn't like what I was doing, I suffer rejections from them and my friends, and even my brothers and sisters, but that couldn't stop me pursuing my dream. They didn't like what I was doing because they believed that people dancing or doing art are people who don't have anything, don't have a meaningful life for the community.

In October 2006, Sarakasi Trust organised the outreach program. Its aim was to go out there to teach young people and to preach the gospel of peace among the community within the slums of Nairobi. To me it was as if my dream were turning into reality, because I had a passion for teaching young people and empowering them with my talent.

At first I was trained and I attended the training and capacity building workshops, which enabled me to handle the children. After the training, I was then introduced to one of the children's home in the slums, together with my co-trainer. I started my duty as trainer fully aware of the challenges ahead thanks to Sarakasi Trust's support, because I was able to pay for my bills, take care of my children and their education, and, above all, support my parents, brothers and sisters, who first had rejected me.

Thanks to the training programme I changed my attitude towards the community in the slums, because I came to realize that they didn't choose to be born over there, but they can choose to live how they want. They can decide to choose to stay or to leave, no matter the circumstance. I decided to come out of that community, and to live another life. That training really helped me a lot because right now I am a professional artist.

I recently started my own acrobatic training program in my new community, to train young people free of charge, hoping that one day it will help them. I am happy with the fact that the training is free, because it allows many interested young people to attend, as it is done by me, one of their own, who has achieved a level of success as performing artist.

It presents to the novice a world of possibilities, a possible escape route from the desperate realities of poverty, crime and unemployment that our neighbourhood offers.

This change is significant to me, because probably the spirit and intensity of the moment will hopefully live with these young people forever, and become part of their inerasable memories. I need to put smiles on their faces each and every day, when I wake up in the morning and I come back home, they're my children. Sometimes I end up clashing with my wife because I usually spend most of my time with the children. I was brought up in a difficult situation, I'm an orphan. Maybe this is the reason why I love to see children's smiles, because I didn't find someone to put a smile on my face in my childhood.

## **(22) All hidden in you**

*Author* : Pelagiah Wangari

*Activity*: Sarakasi Trust's training programme for dancers, 2007.

*Story collected by*: Claudia Fontes and Yvonne Owuor

*Date and place*: 19 October 2009 | Nairobi, Kenya

My names are Pelagiah Wangari, I am 21 years of age, a dancer with Sarakasi Trust and a christian. I joined Sarakasi's training programme in 2007, immediately after my high school education. Joining Sarakasi was not my first option, because I was looking to join the university and passing my education. Eventually the results of my exams were out and I had passed them. I looked forward to joining a University or college to continue with further studies but my family was unable financially to pay my fees because at that time I had my sibling who was still in high school, so I had to sacrifice as to let her finish her education.

Thanks to the funds that Sarakasi got for their training programme, I was assured that I would be coming for training every single day because every single day we were given money to help us come to training. I joined Sarakasi, I got to go for performances, nationally for like a year, and then at the end of my first year I got to go for performances abroad. I've gone to Holland, England, India.

In the beginning of my 'dancing journey' my parents were against it for they thought it would not help me in the future. We come from the countryside, so coming to Nairobi, the big city, it was a drastic change especially for my dad. He didn't take it nicely, thinking that I was going to abandon my studies for something like dance, neither did everyone in my family, my relatives, my friends and all that. I had to be strong, I had to fight back, because I just couldn't let go of dancing. So I continued dancing, and through the performances I earned a lot, I got to move out of my father's house, and I left them. They were not so happy about it, and I just had to go. It was tough and sometimes an emotional roller-coaster, always giving a deaf ear to my parents, disobeying them as I tried to follow my heart. They preferred if I went to school or helped them with the family business. It was really a trying moment for me in that my relatives, who were also not for the idea of me dancing, cast me out of the whole family gathering, claiming that I would mislead their children.

However this all changed when I began going for performances; I even went abroad, they started seeing me on magazines, gazettes and television. Everything changed and all those against my dancing began seeing it more as a career than a hobby, more educational than a way to mislead teens or myself. I even got an opportunity to attend a campaign on drug abuse, which was very educative on my side. My father couldn't believe it, he didn't take art as something that could take you so far, to do so many things. Where I come from there are many artists there, but I kind of led away from them; now the view of the leaders, the elders of the society, of looking at art as such a bad thing, it changed, because they saw my family transformed slowly and you know, this makes me happy.

Being with the Sarakasi family has opened countless doors for me, which I'm very proud of. I am now a leader in the dance department; I am responsible for all ongoings with all dancers under my trainers' supervision, having an assistant. I get opportunities to travel abroad like in July 2009 we got to meet the Ish dancers who are based in Holland and performed at Dubbelleuk. I got to learn so much from them. Sarakasi has been an extraordinary school and family to me that can never be compared to any other thing.

There is also an outreach training program that was initiated this year, where we get the opportunity to teach to young kids artistic skills like dancing, drumming, etc. This program began after the political calamity that fell onto Kenya in 2008. It was to preach peace and reconciliation to the affected communities. I have been

working with a center called Kivuli where street kids are nurtured and developed fully to become responsible citizens of this Nation. I train the children one day per week, four times a month, in 2 hour sessions. When we have performances, I alternate the dates and the timings.

The most amazing thing about those kids is that they don't look at the tribal background of others or where they came from or anything, they love each other so much, it's like they were living in their own world when Kenya was all really messed up. They created their own safe home. That really, really touched me, just seeing them is enough for me to look at life with a different perspective.

On top of that, Sarakasi has improved my skills on dance, I was dancing on 2 left feet when I joined but now at least I can move very well! Other than that, well, dance has taken away a lot from me, not really in a bad way but it has, like, I don't get to unite with my family anymore like I used to- I'm always performing, you know, we're here from 7 until 4 or 5, and then we go for performances at night, there's no time because I'm living alone at my place and have no time to visit my parents. So whenever I go and visit them, maybe 2 months later or something, I feel out of place, it's like I don't belong there anymore. Somehow I would not say it's my fault but it feel that way sometimes because I chose to dance, of which, yeah it's my passion, but it's stolen away my social life. In a way the only friends I get to have is my workmates, of which, well, it's not a very fun environment to be in because you don't know, the next minute your fellow dancer will stab you in the back because maybe they want your position or they want something, so it's not a genuine kind of friendship. My life is cool, I'm doing so fine, there are no complaints, but my social life, it's bad. It's just not the way it used to be, it changed from me, the change is I'm more outspoken, I'm more independent and I can stand on my own two feet and say whatever I feel.

The training programme changed everything. Without it I would still be back at home, maybe working with my mum. It's the most significant to me because I also managed to change so many people's view of what art is, especially my dad, he's a tough one. Now he actually rushes up and down to make sure I'm somewhere where I'm supposed to be. Before, he would be like: where are you going? You're wasting your time.' Now my dad literally takes me there- 'hurry up, you're going to be late!'

## SLUM CINEMA KENYA / BASIC VIEWS

### (23) A different path of life

*Author* : Neville Albert Omondi

*Activity*: Training workshops of Slum Cinema in Korogosho, Nairobi.

*Story collected by*: Claudia Fontes and Yvonne Owuor

*Date and place*: 19 October 2009 | Nairobi, Kenya

I don't know if my story will fit the art part, but the way I understand art, I can say my art lies in the camera. Unfortunately I come from a background that's not that stable but I don't want to talk about the past. I come from one of the 8 villages of Korogocho Slums.

In the last 3 months of my secondary school I developed a passion to serve my community and initiated change in the way that I understood best. I felt it wasn't necessary to work with a social NGO to sparkle that change; anyway in Korogocho there are one hundred NGOs, CBOs, self-help groups, initiatives... The list goes on, and only a few are doing tangible work in the community, while others remain 'briefcase' organizations making cash from the justification pictures and professionally written project reports. They say all the funding, grants, donations that have being taken to Korogocho are enough to build a small New York. Korogocho remained a tourist attraction site that was never affected by recession. If only the community could get knowledge, access the information, then transformation would be easier and more effective. Information is power and it remains so. This is where my career journey began. At 17 (in my neighborhood that's a grown-up), after several months of trying, I landed a position at the Koch Fm community radio station. Koch is an edutainment community radio station, one of the very first of its kind in Kenya inspired by Radio Favela in Brazil. It began from a makeshift transmitter made by one of the geniuses around before getting funds to buy main equipments. It was voluntary and there was no compensation of whichever nature,

the only thing you could get was a staff t-shirt. As my passion was not materialist, then I completely had no problem with that. I went in as information collector for radio programs, walking with my new-found friend, the voice recorder, everywhere I went. Not long, I became a co-presenter on a youth program called 'Badilika' meaning 'changing'. The program gave hope to many young people who had resorted to drugs and crime. Because of the language choice of 'sheng' and the music choice and youthful successful guests, plus the opportunities of announcement that were exclusively for the youth, the program attracted a huge audience among the youth. The impact was visible. I went to become that program's producer.

In the same way that someone had given me that opportunity to use radio to give hope and initiate change through the radio, I decided to pass it to someone. I left the Badilika program to re-start another program, 'Health and Environment'. One of my other interests is the conservation of the environment and so I produced and presented the program. Korogocho has literally no space for planting trees and zero trees to be conserved, so the main issue was cleanliness of the environment. With no drainage system at all and being adjacent to Nairobi's biggest dumpsite, health as issue had to come in. On health we also tackled the otherwise silent conditions such as the fistula, silent because such condition were seen as embarrassing and the sufferers tend to be secluded. We invited doctors, teachers, nurses, health workers, social workers and the patients.

Personally, I felt that radio, especially the radio that I worked for, was already limited. Community radio can't exceed the radius of 20km. I had already mastered the art and passed it down, so I was ready to expand my reach. I looked back to my community, we had sparked change there and gave the voice to the voiceless. I knew being able to produce video was what I needed; the more documentaries I watched, the more my passion for video became stronger. When the then SlumCinema coordinator came looking for someone who they could work with in Korogocho, it was God-sent. He asked me as the first person and there he got me. The next day there was a training workshop on digital video-editing. I was new and I had missed all the other trainings. I was completely 'green'. I had never learnt anything about editing, never, but I learnt it in only 3 days. The first time I saw the equipment I asked myself, this is what is happening, that thing I see on TV passes through here. I could not believe it, because it was just some programme with two screens and... no, I didn't believe it. So I learnt it in 3 days, not to perfection but I could put pieces together in only 3 days...

The first workshop was digital editing and camera work, then we went for another workshop on narration and storytelling. So with those skills I felt I could really do this art of documentary-making and all that. One of the things that inspired the Slum Cinema project was bridging the information gap between the community and the sources of information. What we did was to go to the slums with our cameras and capture unbiased stories from the community. The mainstream media focused only on the negative stories making the positive to go unheard. We gave those untold stories a platform and that inspired more positive initiative from the community as they felt they were appreciated.

We did consultations with the community, that's how we generated our content. With the community's acceptance, we could do stories from deep inside the slums, without fear of being mugged or loose our equipments. In SlumCinema I also trained the communities in editing video and use of cameras. We screened the content to the communities themselves.

While I was working with Slum Cinema, it got into partnership with an organization called Africa Interactive. The partnership meant two of the Slum Cinema members would be recruited into mobile reporting training run by the organization. Slum Cinema's director Gerard Bueters felt I was best suited for the position as I had displayed passion in my stories for his organization. This got me 6 months of training in the Voices of Africa project. This was a defining moment as I could address social issues and change efforts not only in my community but in the whole Nairobi and beyond. Voices Of Africa provided just the perfect platform and the tools; a special mobile phone and an uploading.

I did my first story on Kamiti Maximum Prison's effort to avail clean water. Kamiti, is one of the largest and oldest prison facilities with worst conditions. When Obama-mania swept the world in the year 2008, I did a story from the Nairobi streets. I put more effort every new day. After completing 8 months as a trainee I went to produce mobile reports for Mama Nusra Group. The videos were used by the supporters to get updated on the group's progress and activities.

At that time assignments were coming through from different people and organizations. I began doing a lot of freelancing. At least I could pay most my bills, the problem was that I could loose the focus that inspired my

career. I always wanted to work for the community. Instead I was doing other video productions like music videos, entertainment movies, weddings, news articles.

Currently I am back on track again doing community-media-video productions. FilmAid International gave me the opportunity to serve the community once more. Working with youth refugees and members of host community, they use film to create awareness with focus on local health issues, HIV/AIDS, Peace building and conflict resolution, PSEA/SGBV, Drugs and substance abuse in a PVP project (Participatory Video Production). In Kakuma I found that I could connect with the youth and the diversity of their cultures only makes the whole activity enjoyable.

So this art has really brought me up, because, do you know one thing? I could have become a gangster, maybe do or sell drugs, you can't live without covering very basic needs, so you have to find a way of getting that money. So if Slum Cinema wouldn't have given me these skills, if I knew nothing on editing, I don't know what I would have become. It really helped me. I am a success story from the Korogocho slums. I am a living example of hope that was handed down to me. I just chose a different path of life and Slum Cinema mothered me in it.

## **(24) Now the world can see for itself what Kibera really is like**

*Author* : Francis Mwangi

*Activity*: Slum Cinema Training workshops in Kibera, Nairobi.

*Story collected by*: Claudia Fontes

*Date and place*: October/November 2009 / by e-mail

I was born and raised in the slum of Kibera, which it is the second biggest slum in sub-saharan Africa. The growth of poverty is at a high rate. People over there live on less than a dollar a day, it is not a conducive place to live in.

I had an accident on my head, which affected me with memory; I was paralised on my right side of the body and the doctors told me to start taking medicine and to do physiotherapy. It was a hard time for me and my family but with help of my friend I was able to do physiotherapy and they left when I could walk again. However, medication was a problem because it was too expensive for me, I did not know how to fix it. I had lost hope in life.

When I heard of Slum Cinema I was asking myself WHAT IS SLUM CINEMA? Do they make cinema out of slums? Or do they show cinema in slums? The name was too friendly to me as it was focusing on where I grew. So I went to Laini Saba (a small villllage in Kibera). I was eager to know more about Slum Cinema. I hoped to get a job or to join and start working with them. I was out of school because of school fees. I grew up in a single family so I was looking for a job so that I can fix my life and go back to school. Well, when I heard about screening and workshop with Slum Cinema I was happy because I have passion with the camera. They were willing to train me on the basics of photography and video editing, I was extremely happy.

Now with help of Slum Cinema I started making small reports and shooting video on different occasions and I make money. For sure, Slum Cinema has made my future great on different angles. Now I am able to fix food on the table because of the workshops and the knowledge of Slum Cinema. I see Slum Cinema like a mother who gave birth to me and I love it because when I see a camera I see Slum Cinema.

I was able to pay my school fees, medication and music studio with some payment that I was getting from doing video for people. I have skills thanks to Slum Cinema! I see Slum cinema like bright future to all who wish to learn and to share their skills. I have also been able to meet with many different people.

Shooting images in Kibera means a lot to me, because it is a story in itself, it is real (more than words can explain). Sometimes people tell lies about Kibera... It is a slum, but it does not mean that it is full of evils only. In Kibera we have talents and many other unexploited resources. Through video, I am able to capture this so that the world can see for itself what Kibera really is.

## **(25) My song became a hit**

*Author* : Francis Mwangi

*Activity*: His own music production

*Story collected by*: Claudia Fontes

*Date and place*: October/November 2009 | by e-mail

My singing career started before getting involved with Slum Cinema. It all started when I was a small boy of about 12 years old. At that time I was in the church choir. With time I got encouraged by the public's response to my songs then I started being serious with secular songs. I visited one of the leading production houses in Kenya to find out what I needed in order to produce a song. I was asked for Kshs 40,000. This amazed me! I felt that those people wanted to kill my talent. I started thinking of how I could start doing video myself. That is when Slum Cinema started recruiting and that for me was a golden opportunity.

I used to represent the slum [Kibera] in many shows. One thing that made a significant change in my life is the recording of my two favourite songs: SUSPECT and WALIOTUPENDA. 'Suspect' is a song I did when I saw many of my friends being convicted for evils they did not commit, especially in the slum. They normally say 'never judge a book by its cover'. Surely why should they arrest young men because of their dress code, or hairdo, to name but a few? For this reason that pained me so much, I did the song and it became a hit in the slum and it was loved by so many youths. This saw me meeting so many people and being a popular person among the youth. Through this popularity I was able to address youths in empowerment rallies in Kibera and even organise some.

'Waliotupenda' was a song I did as a dedication to my late sister. She was sick and we had a problem handling the whole issue because of poverty. We loved her so much but we could not afford to provide for medication and therefore she passed on.

Generally, I have been encouraged because I have seen my music inspire so many people, especially the youths. Through my songs I have been able to take part in the mobilization of so many groups in the slum towards achieving a better life through workshops, talent shows, free clinics and the best of them all, forming an organization called 'Ghetto Development Centre' (GDC). This organisation has brought together many youths from Kibera who have different talents in music, video, writing, drama, dance and journalism. We have a journal that is serving the people of Kibera and we look forward to starting a slum TV.

## Stories from MALI

### ACTE SEPT

#### **(1) I have realized that racism and intolerance are attitudes to be banned**

*Author:* Djénèba Diakité

*Activity:* Festival du théâtre des Réalités organised by Acte Sept

*Story collected by:* Claudia Fontes and Ismaïla Samba Traoré

*Date and Place:* 14 October 2009 | Bamako, Mali

Acte SEPT has been organizing the Festival 'Théâtre des Réalités' since 1996; I participated in the first Edition as a hostess; It was at that very time that I realized that I could become a singer and a dancer even if I do not belong to a griot family.

In Mali, many people think that the profession of artist is only meant for the griots; the producers' professions are not developed. The griottes rely on their 'diatigui', the noble men and women, to finance and produce their albums. For the rest of us it is not easy. During that festival, I saw a singer who wasn't a griot, and I told myself that I had to enjoy my passion, do the kind of music I love, embrace a career as an artist, refuse social casts, fight for equal chances.

The festival has been the spring-board, for today I have got three albums.

The festival is significant to me because it enabled different cultures to mingle with one another. Apart from the artists from African countries there were also artists from other continents. The differences did not exist any more; I have realized that racism and intolerance are attitudes, which should be banned. I told myself that the idiot has no nationality.

I have discovered many things, which I did not know before and I had the opportunity to meet some famous artists. In addition to that, what I appreciate the most was to share the same stage with them.

#### **(2) I was showed the way, the best manner to do things**

*Author :* Balla O. dit Abdoul Kader Keita

*Activity:* Festival du théâtre des Réalités by Acte Sept

*Story collected by :* Ismaïla Samba Traoré

*Date and Place :* 14 October 2009, Bamako

I am Balla O. , Abdoul Kader Keita by nickname. I am Chairman of a cultural association called "Pensons à demain" ('Let us think about tomorrow'). I am a visual artist, a product of the Institut National des Arts et des Etudes in Ivory Coast. In 1996, I attended the "Festival de Théâtre de Réalités" where I won the first and third awards.

After that I continued working with Acte SEPT and also with other cultural institutions. But I entered Acte Sept with a precise vision and objective; the purpose was to learn and transmit the knowledge to other people who are marginalized. I stayed from the first edition until 2004 when I established the Association "Pensons à demain", in order to offer assistance to street children.

Before even working with Acte Sept, I had several goals to attain but the one which marked me the most is the one I just spoke about: the establishment of an association for helping the children. It is through my work that I am well known internationally today. When I go out in the streets of Bamako, I am not an unknown person; you ask a kid "who is Kader? " and he will tell you who I am.

Acte Sept showed me the best way to do things, and I followed the path they showed me. This path enabled me to become autonomous in life. I am married, I have a child and I am properly insured. I even have a website.

The most meaningful for me is first of all the fact of participating to cultural events internationally; for instance at art fairs and some festivals abroad as well.

These cultural activities are the most important in the first place, because, if you see that I have created an association today, it is due to the fact that I undertook different itineraries first, I created my own space, my space to express myself. Afterwards, I looked for some particular partners who have nothing to do with the collaboration I had with Acte Sept, though everything started with Acte Sept. Acte Sept helped me a lot during my various trips.

It is thru that assistance that I was able to open other doors in order to achieve my goal. Today, I thank God for I have got some partners in England and I am there almost every year, both for the association and also for my artistic life. Whenever I go there, I not only talk about the association's life but, I also want to work with other local artists. I have been as artist in residency at the British Museum, so I have been moving between London and Reading's Festival, and afterwards also to Oxford and Devon. I operate in those four cities.

There is France as well, where I had the opportunity to go on tour with Blonba's team; we met in Paris and at Auxerre. We went on tour together mainly for some visual arts workshops concerning my personal work. If you do it well, you can earn your living out of that.

Today I do not do anything else but art and I live from my art. I got married thanks to the art-work I sell. I met my wife in Europe and we had a baby together. The child's baptism was financed by money earned thru painting and modeling clay. I can dress myself thanks to this money.

I have got a career plan but for now I keep it aside. I hope it will bear fruit one day for I have overcome many steps to reach this level. They were difficult stages. What was the most difficult? First of all, one has to be well grounded at home, once that is done, you can go abroad and impose yourself in other countries. If you are not able to impose yourself with your art, things could work alright but it will not be easy. That is the most important thing. Even during one of my interviews with RFI and BBC, I said that: how many handicapped people are in Mali? There are many cripples but most of them only beg. Those who did not have the opportunity to go to school are the ones who think of begging all the time. When we say handicapped... we are all handicapped people, even those who can walk are handicapped. There is also the education, which derives from the environment. For instance in the area I used to live in, the people I used to meet, they would tell me "You are a cripple, you cannot do this."

But now I am surrounded by people, I work with people, who have never told me 'Kader, you cannot do this'. Adama [Traoré, director of Acte Sept] has never told me 'Kader, you cannot do this because you are disabled'. He rather tells me 'Kader, if you want to try; there is no problem, go ahead.'

### **(3) To succeed, it's enough to believe**

*Author* : Allaye Guindo

*Activity*: Festival du théâtre des Réalités by Acte Sept

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes and Ismaïla Samba Traoré

*Date and place* :14 October 2009, Bamako

I am a trained anthropologist. After my education I became passionate about cultural activities. That was my situation when I met Mr. Adama Traoré during a seminar in Bamako. I was still a student at the university and since then we have been working together at the cultural association Acte Sept.

The most significant cultural activity, which changed my life is without doubt, the Project Sira Bo of Acte Sept. It was about creating a network of cultural diffusion involving ten towns within the country.

For this project, I was able to travel through the towns and wherever I went, I met the city mayors (Chiefs Metropolitan Assembly), cultural associations, youth and governmental authorities. With each one of them, I discussed their city cultural concerns and a partnership of collaboration was put in place. A second phase enabled me to invite the authorities in charge of those ten cities to a meeting in Bamako. During two days, these authorities exchanged a lot of ideas, they had some debates regarding their concerns in the domain of culture. A play entitled 'Le développement à cœur ouvert en dix tableaux' sealed the meeting.

That activity was significant to me because it opened my mind. Having been given the possibility to travel to those ten towns, to meet different actors, and especially to have been able to contribute to the emerging political zeal at that local level in order to take into account the cultural aspect in the developmental programmes of those towns, constitute for me a motive of great moral satisfaction. One should not ignore the positive economic and social effects (monthly salary, social security...) [I experienced as well].

[Cultural development] is a very wide field on which the State is hesitant to engage, and the partners to the development are observing, and the success of Acte Sept's project proves to them that it is possible. All is needed is to believe and engage oneself with a firm conviction.

#### **(4) I became so popular that I got involved into politics**

*Author* : Moussa Ballo

*Activity* : Coordinator at Sikasso of Acte Sept activities

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes | Transcribed by Oliver Nelson

*Date and place* : 14 October 2009 | Bamako, Mali

I used to be a singer, but with Acte Sept I gained experience through the festival. Thanks to Acte Sept's assets, I created a festival to commemorate the death of Bob Marley because I am a Rasta. So each year, in a given venue at 36 km away from Sikasso, all the people from Sikasso converge. I earn my living from that thanks to Acte Sept. I coach some young artists with the knowledge I acquired at Acte Sept.

Adama [Traore, director of Acte Sept], who is my uncle, saw that I could sing and knew that my parents were opposed to that. Then, he told me "I can train you to be an arts manager, you will be a coordinator and I will give you responsibilities". From then on, I stopped singing. Acte Sept trained me and wanted to produce my cassette, but even so I gave that option [singing] up.

I became so popular that I was able to enter into politics in an attempt to perpetuate art and culture. I would like to be elected as a city mayor or a parliamentarian to perpetuate art and culture; I was once a candidate to be a member of parliament. My popularity [as a festival coordinator] gave me that possibility.

### **BALANI'S**

#### **(5) The forrester from Baoulé**

*Author* : Mahmadou Traoré

*Activity*: Cartoon project 'Issa et Wassa' from Balani's Mali Vert collection.

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes and Ismaïla Samba Traoré

*Date and place* : 14 October 2009, Bamako

The cartoon project "Issa et Wassa" from Balani's collection Mali Vert, has brought a significant change for me as I was making my first steps in the literature arena in Mali. The project came at the right time because on those days I had too many doubts as to whether I could pursue my career in literature, which was my dream, because I had a lot of unpublished manuscripts. Fortunately, that project became like a springboard

at the beginning of my fresh career as a young author. This cartoon came into being the very day I visited the location itself, the Biosphere of the Baoulé, a natural reserve which – though declared UNESCO world heritage in 1982-, it is not well-known in Mali. The site suffered a severe degradation. We initiated that project in order to rescue the site by awakening people's attention through this literary piece. Twelve-year old Issa and Wassa are the main characters. In "Le forestier du Baoulé", we kept the open-mind spirit incarnated by the characters.

Issa and Wassa discover and observe the environmental problems as they wander in the Baoulé. They wonder, diversify their sources of information, and make people aware of their discovery. They suggest some solutions to the local population.

This project enabled me to:

- gain recognition from my peers, from the critics and the press
- open up to the world
- gain self-esteem
- overcome an intellectual challenge
- make a childhood dream come true.

It was the concretization of a child's dream because I have always dreamt to be an author of cartoons. Then it opened some doors for me, especially in the domain of the environment. Now I am an active member of a group, called Tanza, which makes me travel all over the world in order to give conferences to children.

## **(6) Schiller in Mali**

*Author* : Mahamadou Traoré, theatre director, playwright, comedian and storyteller, co-founder of ADPCAS. ADPCAS was created in 2004. This association aims to promote Malian culture and to renovate the national theatre.

*Activity*: Director of "L'intrigue et l'amour de Schiller" at Blonba's space, organised by 'Association de défense de promotion culturelle, artistique et sociale' (ADPCAS) and the German Embassy, June 2009.

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes and Ismaïla Samba Traoré

*Date and place*: 14 October 2009, Bamako

The creation of Schiller's "L'intrigue et l'amour", an adaptation of the 18th century German author's work to the Malian realities, was significant to me. This project enabled me to get rid of a label people had put on me. My peer play-writers thought that I only knew how to make theatre for kids.

On the other hand, this project helped me to create an artwork in which the sources of inspiration and the tools of the creation are contemporary. That project enabled me to unify my sources of inspiration, the tools (the reference and the norms) and the discourse (which builds up the thought).

That creation falls into the frame of contemporary art, which has a zeal for universality.

That creation had a positive reception both from the critics and the press.

Financially, it was a good project because the play continued touring at festivals and at other cultural meetings.

It was significant because to take a German text and adapt it to the Malian reality demanded some intellectual gymnastic. By dealing with this intellectual challenge, a change occurred in my creative process. It was the fact of transcending... I am afraid to say some words... Well, because people think that the Malian theatre is some sort of folklore. So the fact of transcending that, to respect the international standards, the fact of going beyond the stereotypes and working with professional comedians as well... These were all challenges for me.

## **(7) Musical Thursdays' at the National Museum**

*Author* : Mamadou Sangaré

*Activity*: Musical Thursdays, organised by Balani's and the National Museum of Mali.

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes

*Date and place*: 14 October 2009, Bamako

The [cultural] activity, which impressed me the most during these last years, is the Musical Thursdays', an original concept under the National Museum's direction. It is an artistic, musical and cultural show with the aim to open the museum up, to promote and establish a real museum culture through music and attract a greater multiracial and multinational audience.

In fact, Balani's, who is my employer, works in the domain of the production of events, shows, publishing and cultural action. I have managed this program for them for several years. We take care of the realization of the Musical Thursdays' shows in all their aspects: the artistic management, the administration, the pre-production, the contacts, the contracts with the artists, the concept, the content of the leaflets with the monthly programme, their distribution, communication, promotion and mouth-to-mouth publicity, from radio to TV and newspapers.

I am delighted to be in charge of the presentation and of the entertainment on the stage, having by my side a very modest and dynamic team in which everyone has a precise task to accomplish.

Thus, I would seriously say that the Musical Thursdays' shows have deeply changed the quality of my life, always taking into account that every human deed or activity has its strengths and weaknesses. I mean to say that I am simply, today, what the Musical Thursdays' shows have made of me: I am an actor whose name cannot be separated from his activity...

Several significant changes occurred at diverse levels, especially at:

- the intellectual level, regarding the rigor used in the texts about the artists, the research of information, and the skills in communication.

- the professional level, because I have acquired all kinds of experiences, for instance:

being invited, and having contributed and participated in projects and important cultural events. I had access to much training through the courses initiated by the culture department. I also widened my perspective, for instance this year, I was admitted to undergo a Master in "Action Artistique et Culturelle" at the Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers Multimédia Bala Fasseké KOUYATE in Bamako.

- the social level, it was a multiple enrichment, a build up through exchange, collaboration and cooperation. I became popular and a great deal of people is fond of me.

## **(8) African Reggae Festival**

*Author* : Mamadou Sangaré

*Activity*: First edition of the African Reggae Festival at Modibo KEITA stadium in Bamako

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes

*Date and place* :14 October 2009, Bamako

The [cultural] activity which touched me the most, and which memory will stay for longer with me was presenting the very first edition of Tiken Jah FAKOLY 's African Reggae Festival at the stadium Modibo KEITA in Bamako. There were about thirty thousand spectators at that show and it featured other famous artists, coming from many countries in the sub-region: Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Niger, Senegal, and Guinée.

It was in 2006 that I got promoted to be in charge of the stage concerning the area of entertainment. I had two other young colleagues under my supervision. On that day I was assigned the infallible task to introduce and present the mega star FAKOLY. I had three minutes to talk briefly about his life and then announce him to the public...

The event was a challenge and a load on my shoulders because the organizers trusted me. The few days building to the live show were difficult for me, I was under emotion and stress. I was scared of the final unfolding of such a mega show. On a few occasions, I was compelled to isolate myself in order to regain concentration and to get rid off the emotional charges. I needed to do away with the psychological burden as well. I am grateful to God because the release came from a man close to FAKOLY; that very person understood the weight and the importance of my mission. It was an incredible energy which quickened me to the consecration. When I announced the artist, the public responded in symbiosis, it was the climax. It was at that time that General FAKOLY appeared on stage and he took over from me : he literally came to help me.

The Reggae live session had then reached its optimal. That was the vantage point, the sound system and the lyrics were all loud. It was a great joy and I was very happy... it was magic!

## BlonBa PRODUCTIONS

### (9) I am free to exercise my profession

*Author* : Fatoumata Diawara

*Activity*: BlonBa has secured the late education of this young actress who wasn't attending school and used to live in a particularly coercitive family environment.

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes

*Date and place* : October 2009, by e-mail.

When I was 14 years old, I acted in a film, which Blonba's director had adapted. The film was entitled « La Genèse ». So we met on the movie set and since then Blonba and I never left each other!!! I had never gone to school before and I could not read. Blonba took care of my studies for four years. I used to live with an aunt who did not want me to do this work. Blonba did all its best to secure me a contract with Royal de Luxe, one of the biggest street-theatre companies in France. Now I exercise my profession freely and I gained a professional experience, which I acquired thanks to Blonba's help. They are everything to me. I had to give up many things in order to be able to come to France to be professionally free. I had to take some decisions which enabled me to grow and made me be aware of my just value in a society where a woman is not totally free, like is the case in Mali.

### (10) The Revival

*Author* : Nouhoun Cissé aka Baniengo, comedian

*Activity* : Micro-programme "BANIENGO", in the frame of the 'National Programme for the Education of the Citizens.'

*Story collected by* : Ismaïla Samba Traoré

*Date and place* : 14 October 2009 | Bamako, Mali

My most significant story had a decisive turn in my life. After completing my studies at the "Ecole Normale Supérieure", I failed an application for becoming civil servant in 1985. In 2004 Blonba's promoter, Mr. Alioune Ifra N'Diaye called on me to participate in his project, which was the "National Program of Education on Citizenship". I had to play the role of "BANIENGO" in his micro program, a character known by his egocentrism, selfishness, wickedness, conservativeness and irresponsibility. Having impressed the Malian public through that character, I became the star of the year. I became the National BANIENGO thanks to Blonba's assistance, the compliments, the invitations and the presents I received from the public. The precarious situation I was from 1985 to 2004 was transformed into: 1st , I became extremely popular; 2nd , I enjoyed an unexpected financial independency; 3rd , I have been treated with high consideration at all levels in my country, Mali; 4th , I have been giving conferences in schools and the conferences for the micro-programme in the frame of the civic education programme.

In fact, my contact with Blonba enabled me to be considered at all levels: in my family, in my hometown, in my country almost at the level of all governmental institutions, including the State House. In short, I became an educator of the Malian society, indeed.

Still in relation with Blonba, I was asked once again to play the same role of "BANIENGO" at a theater play entitled "South/North", written by Jean Louis Sagot-Duvaouroux, who had stayed in Mali for more than fifteen years. A French man who can talk Bamanan fluently, had understood the meaning of the first Baniengo. So, he wrote this play in which I was the main actor. We performed on several occasions in France. Hence from the series of trips I made abroad, [I experienced]:

1) traveling for the first time in an aircraft and then on six other occasions.

- 2) establishing many contacts made me to get a permanent contract as a storyteller for kids and adults.
- 3) becoming an international comedian.

My subsequent contact with Blonba gave me the opportunity to become a permanent storyteller for kids and adults under a long-term contract with the Benkadi Association. Mme Bintou Dambé of the 20<sup>th</sup> arrondissement of Paris (France) is in charge of that Association.

In short, my socio-economic and cultural status has changed from 1985 to 2008 like day and night. I am currently in the best of my life despite being 56 year old.

## **(11) I am capable of leading a team.**

*Author* : Chiakaa Ouattara

*Activity* : training at BlonBa as technician

*Story collected by*: Ismaïla Samba Traoré

*Date and place*: 14 October 2009 | Bamako, Mali

I have known BLONBA since it got established. When I was a student, Alioune was working at ORTM; he used to do other small jobs along side his work at ORTM. We met through a program; an AIDS project. Then he got to know me better. I used to hang around my senior brother, who is well-known, everyone knows him, so it was easy to get our ways crossed. He works on a contract base at ORTM, as well, but he is self-employed. Alioune contacted me and he said 'My boy, I know that you would like to travel abroad after completing your studies, that is your ambition, but I will get you a job that will make you forget about going abroad'. And that is the way everything got started.

The first job he got for me was as cameraman. I shot all the pictures of BLONBA from Bouaké until today; I am a pioneer. At that time, I used to work only with non-professional cameras, small cameras, cameras used to shoot weddings. That is how I used to work. Then he told me 'you'll be my camera man'. He bought for me a last generation camera. When everybody was using manual cameras, he bought me a digital one. Currently, ORTM may be the only institution having a similar one, in Bamako. I doubt whether any other institution have one like this, because it is really a last generation camera. Immediately I started working with that digital camera.

Surprisingly, someone who was crawling, found himself standing on his two feet and two days later, running. The progress was so fast that I was impressed.

My technical abilities improved. At that time I was a student, so when I completed my studies at the Institute INA, he made me join his working team. There was a light designer, a cameraman, an electrician. We produced Toundou, after Toundou, we had another deal, one of the biggest deals that BLONBA had ever got. BLONBA got properly established as a structure and as an administration.

I went through all the steps, from the lowest to the highest level. I passed through all the hierarchy scale and I am at the top level of BLONBA today.

The most significant change for me is: BLONBA made me responsible even though I was young, made me able to guide a team without any assistance. I am capable of conducting alone a BLONBA show from the beginning to the end. I work with a team, for instance we are two running an edition and it happens that my peer is absent, I have no problem conducting the program alone. All these experiences enabled me to be responsible enough to conduct an event without any problem.

Once there was a theatre play and he asked me to lead the team. I didn't know the play so I did not know what I was going to do. He told me "It is a comedy; I have to go, I need you to replace me". Ah! on that day, I told myself "Ah, my boy, you might be short, but you are not short-minded."

## CENTRE SOLEIL D'AFRIQUE

### **(12) The first time I used a computer**

*Author* : Modibo Doumbia

*Activity*: ICT training workshop for young artists, 2005

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes and Ismaïla Samba Traoré

*Date and place* :14 October 2009, Bamako

The most significant activity to me was the workshop organized by Centre Soleil d'Afrique at "CREST", on the hill. It was a training course on "INTI" techniques (Initiation to the New Technology of Information) for young artists.

During that workshop, already eight or nine years ago, I touched a computer for the first time [in my life]. These tools have become part and parcel of my life from then on, because it is very difficult to communicate with people abroad without using the Internet, the new technology of information.

I am obliged to make some pictures of my artworks, scan them and then send them by e-mail for the websites where I currently feature. It is very important for me to be able to do so.

I think it is a great improvement because this kind of opportunity is not given to everyone, not everybody has the opportunity to work with a computer. I learnt the basic techniques of Illustrator and Photoshop, so now I can work with both softwares. I make use of that knowledge to do some work for NGOs and associations; I make illustrations and I get paid for that.

Concerning the artworks, I do my sketches with the computer before painting. This way of working enables me to decide what colors I can use here and there.

From some time now I have been selling my artwork through Internet. It helped me to build a studio where I work and exhibit my artwork to the public.

Acquiring this knowledge also helped to enlarge my range of creation. This year I completed with success my course at the Conservatory of Arts and Business Multimedia of Mali. You need to pass a test before entering that Institute, for which a knowledge of multimedia and visual arts is required. I think Soleil d'Afrique gave me almost everything I needed to reach that level.

### **(13) Ouassa Sangaré's story**

*Author* : Ouassa Sangaré

*Activity*: Bogolan-Photo workshop organised by Centre Soleil d'Afrique, 2006

*Story collected by* : Ismaïla Samba Traoré

*Date and place* :14 October 2009, Bamako

I participate of the artistic activities at Centre Soleil d'Afrique. I have acquired a lot of experience through workshops organized at the Centre, which have enabled me to come into contact with a lot of artists, such as photographers, painters, filmmakers, and visual artists. The artistic activities of the Centre helped me to appreciate more my profession as a photographer and to acquire more information about photography. I can even confirm that these artistic activities have enabled me to be more professional in my work and I was able to complete my training.

Since 1998 until today, many things have produced a bit of change for me, because as a photographer, it is not easy. Exchange and understanding are the keys; it is important to understand your peer. It is not easy for the artists in Mali. It was difficult at the beginning, but gradually, people understood us. People used to

believe that photography was only meant for men and that was a barrier. But as time goes by, people understood that women could also do this work though the men are still domineering. Currently, with great effort, we are many women performing this work.

I benefited from many facilities at the Centre, which made me stronger. The Centre joined me in many trips to make exhibitions.

The most significant for me is the fact that I am able to enter to some places where it is not allowed to take pictures. Now I can go into houses, societies and even in mosques to snap pictures. I really have the chance to gain access to all of these locations.

The programs at the Centre have contributed to the expansion of my knowledge in photography. For instance, Centre Soleil d'Afrique organized "Ideograms" (Bambara signs), a workshop which helped me to focus on my work as photographer on other materials beyond the images, for instance on fabric. I understood that photography is not limited to take pictures. During this activity, I printed on a piece of fabric the motives I had caught with my camera. It was my first experience [doing this] and that is why this activity has been so significant for me.

These events were significant for me because they enabled me to exhibit my personal work in public. Therefore I can confirm that these artistic activities have helped me to be more professional in my work and to complete my professional training.

## **(14) The Art Teacher from Holland**

*Author* : Souleymane Sangaré King, aka Solo

*Activity*: Station Gare Mali, 2008/2009

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes

*Date and place*: 14 October 2009, Bamako

I live in my own house-studio at Mamaribougou (Kanadjiguila) in Moto, in the suburbs of Bamako. In reference to the most significant change I have experienced and live right now, in relation to the activities and staff of Centre Soleil d'Afrique, that has to be the reception [they gave me]. In fact I met Mr Hama Goro well before I came to the Centre.

We met at INA of Bamako during a meeting for the selection of painters for the 2nd edition of "LA RUE DES ARTISTES" ('The Artists Street'). There were almost twenty participants; the program took place at the Modibo Kéita Memorial in 2003.

The 1st Edition of "The Street of the Artists" was under the authority of Amara Sylla and Souleymane Sangaré Sangah. By that time I took the artistic name "KING SOLO". The exhibition-debate was held at the ENSUP. The then Minister of Culture Mrs. Aminata Dramane Traoré was the guest-of-honour at that edition. Other workshops were held at the Palace of Culture of Bamako supervised by Mr. Abdoulaye Konaté, currently Director of the Conservatoire of Bamako. During the 4th Edition of the Visual Arts' Market, also some workshops were coordinated by Mr. Ismaeil Diabaté.

In short, my itinerary is too long so I will try to point out some recent events.

So many financial difficulties to keep this meeting activities and Ateliers-Expo going guided me through my own artistic journey. They also helped me to be able to manage my painting workshop called ARTOFORME, which was operating then. Our Cultural Association was recognized and it got documented. I arrived to Centre Soleil d'Afrique with all these assets.

So I was already operating in the are of art and culture, aware that if I kept working on my own, in these days, my artistic ambitions would be very limited. I realised this after each activity, after each evaluation. Following such an eventful journey, a centre like Centre Soleil d'Afrique was the best place for me; taking into account the spirit of collectiveness and working culture, I thought it could become for me a source of opportunities, where to build relationships in the country and abroad.

When I reached the Centre I participated in workshops, the last one being 'STATION GARE MALI', a group workshop - exhibition. Through the opportunities I had in my two years at Centre Soleil d'Afrique, I gained self-esteem; there is a sense of unity at Centre Soleil d'Afrique that motivates and encourages me. Thanks to those opportunities, I got the strength to do my best, I have the feeling that my unwavering artistic dream about the Arts emerging and enduring will become real sooner than expected.

I will tell you a story: it's about my unexpected arrival to Centre Soleil d'Afrique one fine morning. I dropped into a workshop for which I hadn't received an invitation. My love for Arts made me to join my friends the artists, who were busy in a workshop. So I joined it, but how? There was neither material nor financial assistance budgeted for me! At that very moment the Art teacher from Holland, whom I had just met for the first time, brings the solution to my problem. He brings out from the storeroom of the Centre an old 5 meter banner which was already painted, he gives it to me, and tells me: - "Mr. SOLO, could you do something with this piece of fabric?" And in haste, I answered: "yes, with pleasure." Just imagine the rest. Because that piece of fabric was reserved for the teacher, representative and guide from DOEN Foundation. Moreover, it was the work which illustrated better the theme of the workshop - exhibition.

Later that day, the teacher cracked some joke by saying: "Hama Goro, you are not the Director any more, now SOLO is the director". That made me laugh, and that experience built in me some self-confidence in my craft, in my work. I will forever remain grateful onto you for giving me that self-esteem which every artist needs. That is the most beautiful story that I can tell you at the moment in relation to Centre Soleil d'Afrique through your honorable DOEN Foundation. Thank you.

## **(15) We keep on learning**

*Author* : Amadou Sanogo

*Activity*: Workshops and activities of Centre Soleil d'Afrique since 2000

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes

*Date and place* : 14 October 2009, Bamako

As far as I am concerned things have changed a lot because my way of working used to be different before I met the people at Centre Soleil d'Afrique and had my residences. I changed a lot in respect to cultural techniques and to artistic openness as well. At the Center I learnt what is the design, the bogolan on wood, bogolan-photo and video editing.

I didn't spent much time in the school system so I hadn't learnt about artistic languages. It was at the Centre that I could meet some big names from the African art world, such as Ludovic Fadaïro, Kossi Assou and Sockey Edor.

Currently communication is the most important and essential tool in the whole world. We need to exchange ideas, see what is being done, learn from the masters, have the chance to be observed by them and try to exchange [knowledge] on a regular basis; to get their advice without impositions, but through their advice to get pushed so that we can go an extra mile.

I genuinely feel that I improved because I have been making 100% my living from my painting for almost four years now, 100% from my artwork.

Everything I have today was acquired through painting. I am not bragging, but the first sales of work began in 2004. From 2004 to today, I have got nothing to complain about because I have been earning a good living without problem. I am able to take care of my needs and those of my family.

I would say that 95 % of my sales are all over the world; my works are found in all five continents. But if you check here at the national level I wonder whether you could find ten of them.

My life has changed a lot; though nobody is financially satisfied the way the world is today, my situation is not bad at all. Intellectually, I am now capable of expressing myself with complete freedom. I used to find it difficult to follow a personal theme, but currently, I have an artistic theme based on "Human Behavior". All my works are a bit based on that theme.

I used to work with Centre Soleil d'Afrique, but currently I am working more with the embassies, like the French Embassy. I have been working with them for almost three years. Now I do not work much with Canadians, though at the moment I am preparing an exhibition in Quebec.

In general, those who buy my paintings are the ones who look for residences for me; for instance with the French Embassy, I had two residences at the Ecoles des Beaux Arts de Paris.

All these experiences have enabled me to win some trust and esteem from the youth in my neighborhood. At the moment I can say that I have become a role model to the young people: not in relation to painting but in relation to mental attitude. These youngsters saw my early start when I was in the area, they used to consider me mad. But currently these same people come to see me and ask me to help them on various causes. And those youngsters have realized that what I make is not for the gift shop, there must be something to it. The curiosity to know what I do, put them on my side. Finally they understood that there is a philosophy behind what I do.

## **(16) I gained enough self-confidence to dare to establish my own photo-studio**

*Author* : Pinda Diakité

*Activity*: Workshop coordinated by Malick Sidibé and Michel François at Centre Soleil d'Afrique, 2001

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes

*Date and place* : 14 October 2009, Bamako

The meeting with Centre Soleil d'Afrique has been very important to me because I had never participated to such a gathering before. On one hand, it enabled me to know many artists from different backgrounds (in terms of working methods).

On the other hand I was able to apprehend the differences between cultures, what gave me great experience and artistic knowledge, especially about the concept of artistic photography. In short, meeting Soleil d'Afrique has enabled me with a solid artistic base in photography.

I only can congratulate and be thankful to Centre Soleil d'Afrique as it continues to assist me in my endeavor. As long as they keep multiplying their workshops and meetings I will keep making the most of the knowledge and experience of the trainers and of the quality of the exchange with other artists.

My greatest satisfaction has been above all the self-confidence I gained, which made me start my own photo studio. This self-confidence came up after the workshop with Malick Sidibé and a photography teacher from Belgium, who was invited by Soleil d'Afrique on that occasion. This studio is my source of income today.

Soleil d'Afrique helps me even to solve my family problems through some advice and often some financial support. Thanks to this, I have my own studio, which is a source of income for my whole family. People hire our video services for their weddings, baptisms, feasts, etc.

## **FESTIVAL SUR LE NIGER**

## **(17) Getting noticed will help you to go further**

*Author* : Abdoulaye Diarra

*Activity*: Festival sur le Niger

*Story collected by* : Ismaïla Samba Traoré (original in Bambara)

*Date and place* : 14 October 2009, Bamako

I am an artist and I live in Ségou. I play traditional Malian music. The festival was an occasion for me to discover and learn many things, to develop my intelligence and get to know many things I didn't know before. In fact I gained a lot from the festival.

It has been an opportunity for me to get a lot of contacts abroad and I have collaborated with some important personalities.

I was able to produce some tapes with the help of some collaborators. This helped me in turn to get a contract which enabled me to travel. Before this, I had never traveled anywhere and I wasn't very well-known.

I acquired recognition and reputation. This has helped me in turn to take care of my family very well. I am married, I've got children and I have no problem taking care of their needs. My father's reputation helped me a lot in pursuing my career as well.

I can say that the most advantageous thing that happened to me was to win the award of the competition organized by the festival. It really impressed me and it gave me more courage in doing my work because getting noticed, you realize that it helps you to go further.

## **(18) The 'Festival sur le Niger' brought us back to life**

*Author* : Daouda Dembelé, aka LABOUZOU

*Activity*: Festival sur le Niger

*Story collected by* : Ismaïla Samba Traoré

*Date and place* :14 October 2009, Bamako

I started playing music with the Super Biton Orchestra from Ségou in 1988. People got to know me in the villages in the district of Ségou and in Ségou itself because I have done a lot of things in those communities. But it was the festival that enabled me to be really well-known by a big audience. Before the Festival, we had many problems in our work. We have been in music for quite some time. The initiative of the Festival has helped many people who were not known to become famous.

I mean to say that I was among those artists who were not known. Ségou was in the darkness, everyone was in this darkness, but today, Ouolossos, korédougas, miniankas, all those who make music, they gather along the great River Niger to honor Daffé's call. I've been working in the festival since 2005. I carried out many activities there and that helped me to have a lot of opportunities. I had opportunities to travel abroad and we cannot explain that without mentioning the one who really guided us, helped us, who gave us his support, who has brought us back to life, because if we don't mention him [Mamou Daffé], we would be ungrateful.

With the help of Daffé I am known now in Mali and abroad. Daffé made us move from darkness to light. I went abroad. My first time out, it was to Luxembourg. I met the Head of State. We went there for 3 weeks. When I returned God opened the way for me to make a second trip. I went to Marseille for two and half months. After being there I went to Paris and Barcelona in Spain. Now, I make the DJEMBES, I send them abroad to be sold then they send me my money. When I was in Marseille I produced a CD over. I was so happy and proud that I could not refrain from seeing Daffé.

I went up to Daffé's house to see him and I told him: 'the work you have started at Ségou has been incredible. We have languished in the pit for long, we were dead and you have brought us back to life. This CD is proof of the advantages we had, and I am giving it to you to show my gratitude towards you'; and I gave him a CD.

Meanwhile I have opened a store. The Niger River festival is the cause of all that. I have now 40 young students between 12 and 15 years old. I teach them how to make the DJEMBE for free. When someone helps you to move forward and you become successful, it is also your duty to show a way of development to those who are behind you; I mean the youth.

I do not teach these youngsters because of money but I do that to show them that I love my work. We have been helped and assisted by someone in order to reach this level, therefore, in the same way, we ought to try and think of other young people who follow us.

But which is the most significant change for me that makes me smile like this?

The answer to this question is the simplest one. If the Festival opened up opportunities in Ségou, to bring back to life those who were dead, the most significant opportunity for me was that I could get married. I got married to a white woman, we had children, this makes me explode in happiness. To get married to a white woman is cause of pride for a black man. If you meet one, you need to smile, don't you? There are many people who look for this, and do not get it. We, who never expected to meet a white woman, we need to smile. I celebrate my marriage and all that, thanks to Festival sur le Niger.

After all these changes, I am respected in my family, in the street, I am well known by everyone. In all Ségou, if you ask my name, Labouzou, everyone knows me, everyone calls me like that.

Previously, I used to play the DJEMBE and I was not earning money. I carried the DJEMBE on the stage then I took it back home. My parents complained and they were wondering why I still carried on with a work, which earned me nothing. Yes, this is true. I am still into music because it is a career I love.

But when I see that I have persevered in this profession until today, in the same business, and that I have been able to solve so many problems even for my parents, I have done a lot for this family, I can only rejoice. Today my parents as well as my brothers and sisters congratulate me.

Who can say that music is not helpful? We have all been earning our living through music though when we were children they did not like us to be musicians at the beginning. But later they understood us and they like it now. That is our source of income. We live out of music thanks to someone who gave us the opportunity to be in the spotlight. Now we left the darkness, we are in the spotlight and we are well-known.

## **(19) I saw myself as an artist**

*Author* : Souleymane Ouologuem

*Activity*: organisation of visual arts activities at *Festival sur le Niger*.

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes

*Date and place* :14 October 2009, Bamako

I am Souleymane Ouologuem, I am a visual artist, I am 34 years old. I have participated at the 'Festival sur le Niger' from the beginning until now. I used to go there as an artist in order to exhibit my art-work for then to return to Bamako.

On a trip to France, when leaving from Paris, I met Mamou Daffé, the festival's manager at the airport as we took the same flight. Then he told me that he would like to work with me at the Festival, and I said: 'no problem.' 'If you'd like to work with me, I am available.' That festival is my life, he said 'that is the only thing I do'.

During the last edition, I started to be part of the organization. Before I used to be an invited guest only, but now, I am part of the organization, mainly in the field of visual arts. This year, we will organize a workshop on creativity, a workshop, which that we will coordinated with Hama Kéré Dolo and Youssouf Diarra. The three of us form part of this committee. We were in charge of everything dealing with exhibitions and workshops. We organized everything and we did our best for the workshop to be a success. Our work was well done and concrete so everybody was impressed. Right from that time I became a member of the organizational team of the Festival sur le Niger. He [Mamou] assigned me this responsibility at the organization of the festival; I am the representative of the Festival sur le Niger in Bamako, in charge of the visual arts exhibitions and workshops.

First of all, I can say that I was really touched by the acknowledgement I felt and this made me took the decision to join the festival. And also by the responsibility given to me, as it made me responsible for attracting other people to the festival. I have also conducted a workshop and that was a new thing for me. Before I used to be part of the organisational team, but in this case it was a specific task, which I hadn't experienced before, my first experience was at the Festival.

I saw myself as an artist, that's the meaning. I think he [Daffé] saw something in me that impressed him and made him think that I could be useful in that perspective. And that made me see myself as an artist.

I could say that it had a great impact on my career because it increased my popularity at, both, the local and international levels. I feel dignified.

Concerning my family, I can say thanks to God, because they used to complain about my work but now they can see some improvement; they have seen that I am moving forward.

## **(20) Getting together opened doors up for us**

*Author* : Souleymane Ouologuem

*Activity*: Association Franco-Malienne.

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes

*Date and place* :14 October 2009, Bamako

As a visual artist, and independently from Centre Soleil d'Afrique and Festival sur le Niger, I am a member of other associations, other teams, other groups; one of them is the Franco-Malian Association we created with Modibo [Doumbia] and Amadou [Sanogo]. We are eight Malian visual artists.

We sometimes organize some exhibitions together and we think of organizing more activities together in the years to come. We organized two or three exhibitions in France, where some amongst us sold a few paintings and had the opportunity to put on leasing some of our works in France, which is very rare in the visual arts scene. We got into contact with other organisations to whom we rent our artwork out and in return we received some money.

This has had many other benefits. It is not only to get money, but it also enables the works of the artists to be seen in other continents. This is important as it also encourages the artists. They feel motivated whenever they see their artworks traveling, hung in other galleries or in other areas apart from their own country.

Individually, I was seen by the audience and that was unexpected for me. This opened many doors because it enabled me to travel as well. Each time our works were in exhibition we introduced ourselves and thereafter we had the opportunity to ask for other favours.

I remember a meeting at the National Museum here; I approached a representative of the Museum of Quai Branly in Paris. He is the Director of the Archives of Cultural Heritage. On that day, many people had been invited, but I think only a few attended. That was an intercultural exchange that took place at the National Museum. That [encounter] facilitated me [the possibility to] coordinate the workshops I do at the Museum of Quai Branly. Now I conduct seven workshops on intercultural exchange twice a year.

## Stories from Senegal

### GROUPE 30 AFRIQUE

#### **(1) The promotion of copyright in Senegal: clashes and sparks at the debut of a pioneer...**

*Auteur* : Youssou Soumare

*Activité*: Article sur droit d'auteur édité sur Missik, une publication de Groupe 30 Afrique.

*Entrevue faite par* : Claudia Fontes et Oumar Ndao

*Date et lieu* : 16 Octobre 2009, Toubab Dialaw

The most significant change was linked to the fact of finally finding a genuine forum of information and communication through the new platform 'MISSIK', the newsletter that the association [Groupe 30 Afrique] had just launched.

My collaboration with Groupe 30 was as consultant in copyright issues, and in the role of adviser of the project, the interpretation and the execution of contracts for editing, production and representation amongst other things. This enabled me to continue the task of sensibilisation that I had begun after writing my tesitation for the Masters in Law at Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar. The theme of that tesitation was 'The Rules of Remuneration in Senegalese Copyright'.

I had received some encouraging remarks from my tutor, Professor Ibrahima CAMARA who showed satisfaction regarding 'the qualities and the merit of this work on issues which have been less studied until now'. Professor Ibrahima CAMARA is a doctor in Private Law and a specialist in Law of Intellectual Property, Associate lecturer at the Cheikh Anta Diop [University] in Dakar and in charge of courses at the OMPI World Academy.

Naturally, such a study had to be investigated further and enriched. I had just realized that the issues deriving from that study were important and that there was a whole field to be discovered. Being an intellectual engaged with the development of my country, and aware of the role that I could play, I took the challenge convinced that everything is possible with commitment and determination.

The formation received at the University does not equip us enough to embrace the professional world, which is different to the theory we learn. Henceforth a new learning process was necessary to fine-tune, consolidate and enrich the theoretical knowledge I had received. As a young solicitor, I had to lay the foundations to create space in a particular and complex sector, and at the same time I had to take into account different actors and rules. Where could I start?

The first step to make was surely to contribute to disclose, inform, divulgate the notions of copyright in order to attract the attention of the creators, professionals who revolve around the cultural industries, the consumers of artworks and culture (the audience), the users (producers of art and shows), the decision-makers (public authorities), the socio- professional associations, and to generate an intellectual debate on the new concepts related to the subject.

This is where the meaning of my activities with Groupe 30 Afrique lies. It was fortunate, having into account the position that Groupe 30 Afrique has as a pan-African association very much involved in issues related to the development of cultural industries, through her Coordinator Oumar SALL.

This newsletter called 'MISSIK' -meaning 'music-', was a pretext for the initiator to provide a critical approach on the new musical products in the market. On one of the editions of "Missik", I was interviewed by the editor to throw some light on who owns copyrights, the protection of artistic works in general, the duration of that protection, etc...This partnership truly launched me into the professional world where I could collaborate with and meet the cultural actors and decision-makers.

The impact of this partnership, which started with the creation of an article on copyright has been very important for several reasons:

-It enabled me to develop my professional career.

-I could contribute actively and significantly to the promotion of the intellectual property rights in my country (the article became the topic of comments in the newspapers; I mean in the national daily papers and on the Internet as well – I kept some of the chronicles).

-This has enabled me to weave a network in the arts and culture scene through the forums and other gatherings, which were put on place by this collaboration. I also built some partnerships at the professional level (consulting, legal assistance...)

I had the opportunity to participate and contribute to meetings and seminars both at a national and international level (seminar in Rabat on cultural industries in 2003), etc.

## **(2) Art at the service of humanism**

*Auteur* : Fola Lawson

*Activité* : Ateliers d'art pour des enfants de rue chez Man-Keneen-Ki, la Maison-école d'art pour les enfant errants de Dakar sous l'aile de Groupe 30 Afrique

*Entrevue faite par* : Claudia Fontes

*Date et lieu* : 16 Octobre, 2009 | Toubab Dialaw

First of all, I would like to take this opportunity to testify my recognition to Groupe 30 Afrique, for its remarkable cultural activities for the artists, regarding cultural and artistic information, and various projects as well.

One of the activities, which has marked me most is the fact that I have discovered the humanism in Arts. I coordinated a series of visual arts workshops in benefit of vulnerable children under the umbrella of Groupe 30 Afrique.

It was really a great experience for I have realized how much art can contribute to the education and bring knowledge to people who were not fortunate enough to have access to a basic education. During the workshops I had with the street children, I witnessed hidden talents in some of them, they made quite promising work.

This experience enables me today to understand my mission as a cultural operator, which is to contribute to issues related to the development and my responsibility towards my fellow-countrymen. I would say that the first contact with the Groupe 30 Afrique revealed to me the notion of art at the service of humanism.

The second artistic event that I experienced and which brought a rather significant change to my career, has to do with a collaboration of Groupe 30 Afrique with a cultural association based in France, called 'Les chantiers de la lune' that offered me three successive residences from 2007 to 2009.

Those residences helped me to do various exhibitions and to hold a series of workshops on Batik and visual arts for teenagers and adults in the region of Seyne sur mer, Toulon, France. It is important to notice that thanks to that collaboration of Groupe 30 Afrique with 'Les chantiers de la lune', I was able to showcase my work at the international level and that opened other doors which have an impact on my professional career.

## **(3) The solution lies in sharing means and knowledge**

*Author* : Ousmane Faye

*Activity*: Advice and expertise of Groupe 30 Afrique for ADAFEST

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes

*Date and place*: 16 October 2009 | Toubab Dialaw

I have a story rather out of the ordinary. I can say that I am a self-taught person. I learnt many things out of necessity before undertaking professional training in music. Since I was very young, I have been participating in various activities in association with others. I founded with my friends from the neighborhood the Super Diamono fan club, where we used to meet and share their lyrics and melodies, mingling with refined traditional and modern music from Super Diamono in Dakar.

Through the years, I acquired a good experience and the character of a leader, particularly within the Super Diamono fan club. It became a federation of local clubs, the AFSUD (Association of Super Diamono's fans), and I was the first president from 1989 to 1997. Through that I had the opportunity to meet Oumar PENE

and the Super Diamono regularly, which was the dream of many young Senegalese. The group cares a lot for the fans, who conform an important network. This pushed me to gain interest on the music sector at an early stage. My friends and I had already developed some pertinent ideas during our gatherings (meetings, forums, classes...). We wanted to contribute to the promotion of this group (heritage), to the promotion of music in general, and also to be part of the socio cultural-development. For us [in Senegal], music is a cause of mobilization and of social cohesion. It was our aim to take the songs of artist Oumar PENE as a starting point to display actions. In short, I attained my goal. That was how I outstood in 1995. Oumar PENE made me his manager's assistant.

Meanwhile I remained active in the fan club and in my neighborhood by organizing concerts with my friends and some local musicians. As I was moving forward in those activities, I felt the need to become professional. In 1998, I struggled to obtain a scholarship from the French embassy cooperation, who had delivered an exceptional one the previous year. That scholarship enabled me to finance my training in France at the Institute INIREP/ IRMA, as Manager in the World of Music. I ended up with a specialization in Phonographic Production. That training has also helped me to develop good cultural management capacities. I built some contacts and developed my project for a festival, which I set up as soon as I came back. Since I returned to Sénégal in 1999, I have been doing both works: my career as Oumar PENE's manager, and my career as artistic director for the 'Festival Banlieue Rythme' [Suburban Rhythm Festival]. My main project in the short-term is to put in place a musical industry, called 'Banlieue Rythme Music'.

Through my career I have observed three representative elements of the cultural operators in Sénégal:

-First element, an associative commitment of the actors; an enthusiasm and a will to become active and outspoken citizens for the development;

-Second element, the strong will to professionalize; the lack of training in the cultural sector in Senegal is serious;

-The last and third element, the necessity to become a polyvalent actor in order to afford the lack of human resources.

Those three elements are relevant to the professional and financial aspects of the cultural sector in Sénégal. They reflect the concerns of the entire group of stakeholders (producers, broadcasters, promoters, technicians and institutions).

Certainly that made me persevere. I think that there is nothing such as fatality, and that problems will find their solutions in consultation. Here comes what I would like to share with you all. Two years ago I had the opportunity to call for a common reflection during a press meeting for the website 'Wootico' organized by Oumar NDAO. We were fortunate to be all there (broadcasters, festival and event organizers) to point out what was going wrong in our activities. At the end of our meeting we agreed unanimously:

- the cut down of activities and cultural events across Sénégal

- the lack of human resources, unprofessionalism, mix-and-match, etc.;

- the lack of financial resources, no access to funding, lack of engagement from donors, no accountability and no planning.

- lack of communication, overcrowding of activities, programming and planning issues, etc.

This meeting opened our eyes and allowed us to share a deeper reflection and to find common answers to different problems.

The second meeting was decisive; we decided to establish a permanent space for meeting and collaborating. The Association of Festivals and Artistic Broadcasters was set up (ADAFEST SENEGAL). During that meeting, I suggested to ask Groupe 30 Afrique to join the discussions. Through this association, Oumar SALL [director of Groupe 30 Afrique] was appointed as permanent coordinator because of his experience and his technical and material resources. He also has a good knowledge in organizing and structuring networks. He is an expert in communication and fundraising, because he has headed several funding committees himself. Thus he was designated as the association's expert.

With the support of the Groupe 30 Afrique and the financial assistance of Africalia and UNESCO, we held a six-day seminar for the elaboration of the association's three-year strategic plan, during which we worked on several projects, such as:

- The creation of a thrift and Credit Mutual Organization referred to as 'Credit Arts';

- The establishment of a license for event organizers;

- A project for the cultural development of the country called 'Bawanal Cadda'.

These projects have already received the approval from institutions and donors such as the Senegalese Ministry of culture, Africalia -who has included it in its triennial programme from 2012, UNESCO, and DOEN who is very much aware of this project. So that has changed all.

Personally, I am proud of this achievement, because if I look back at my career, I must say that I inspired a lot of hope in my generation through the formation I received.

Today, there are many young people who have come back into the music sector because they saw me improving and moving forward in that area. Today they believe that it is a profession as any other. As far as this profession is concerned, if one believes in it and works hard, he can make it. I am proud and honored to be the leader of such a movement. This is not because I am the best educated, but I think it is because of my experience and due to the fact that I set the bases for these discussions.

'Banlieue Rythme' was also one of the first cultural adventures in the cultural events sector in Senegal.

There was nothing before, only the desert, to where I came back after being formed, and with a few relationships, contacts and partners, we could launch the idea of 'Banlieue Rythme'. That initiative became a springboard to many young operators. It showed the example and inspired the youth; today they are more than fifteen, twenty of them, and I am proud of this. Throughout this process, from 2001 to today, Groupe 30 Afrique has always been to our side providing us with technical assistance.

#### **(4) Kymsnet Media Network and Groupe 30 Afrique – Harnessing Information to Develop the Art Scene**

*Author* : Kimani wa Wanjiru, Managing Director/Editor of Kymsnet Media Network, Kenya's premier culture and arts news agency.

*Activity* : Networking and information provided by Groupe 30 Afrique, around the workshop on art critic organised by Dak'Art Biennale and AICA in 2003.

*Story collected by*: Claudia Fontes and Yvonne Owuor

*Date and place*: 19 October 2009 | Nairobi, Kenya

The journey began way back in the late 1990s. By that time I had started to make my partial switch from a performing artist to a journalist or is it a correspondent specializing in culture and the arts. Since the time I had started reporting as a freelance correspondent, I had met outstanding African artists, movers and shakers like the great Burkinabe filmmaker Gaston Kabore, remarkable contemporary dance troupes from South Africa, gifted thespians and story tellers from Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, writers, etc and they had wonderful stories. I felt that I was quite lucky to be able to interview and write these stories for the Kenyan public but I couldn't help thinking that perhaps, we also needed a forum—a Pan African forum where others could hear about artists and their works from this part of the region.

With this going on in my mind, it was easy to buy into the idea of setting up a portal and a newsletter to consolidate cultural information in Africa and Europe also known as "Reseau d'information culturelle en Afrique et en Europe" (RICAFE), and its website, [www.africinfo.org](http://www.africinfo.org)

RICAFE was set up in February 2000, after representatives of cultural centers from the Central African Republic, Cameroon, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Congo-Brazzaville met in Bangui. The Benin Mediatheque des Diasporas, the Groupe 30 Afrique from Senegal, and Africultures, who were given the mandate to drive the project, were also present. A decision was made to use the new technologies to create a Pan-African information circuit and relayed in Europe by Africultures. While most of the founding partners were from French-speaking Africa, it was also decided to include several other countries from the English-speaking parts and that is how I and Kymsnet Media Network, the agency that I represent, got involved with Groupe 30 Afrique.

Our involvement with RICAFE/africinfo.org was a dream-come-true. We benefited a great deal in numerous ways at an organizational and even individual level, one of the main ones being the information exchange we started having with Groupe 30 Afrique.

It was through this exchange of information that we learnt of a capacity building workshop/conference in Dakar that was meant to bring together journalists/art critics from various corners of the continent to learn about art history, criticism and coverage.

Organized by the managers of the Dak'Art Biennale in Senegal and International Association of Art Critics (AICA) headquartered in Paris, Afrique en Creations and other stakeholders, the workshop/conference took place in 2003, a year before the 5th anniversary of the Dak'Art Biennial of African Contemporary Art.

I learnt from the best art historian and critics from Africa, the art of writing about fine art. This enabled me to be an effective art writer in the local scene. It was a session that increased my analytical skills and greatly influenced the way I started viewing works of arts. It was an important personal journey that led to my deeper appreciation of the history of art and particularly the one for Africa arts and artists. It was an eye opener that enabled me to see details in works of art on canvas, installations, sculptures, etc., that had hitherto just appeared as part of details in a work of art. I was able to see and comment effectively on insightful storylines, issues and concerns in a piece of art.

This ability to see details and story angles in greater details was also transferred to other art genres like music, film and even literature. The workshop was an effective exercise to see storylines from various angles and while there, I managed to get a storyline to an EXCLUSIVE story that has stood out throughout my writing career. I met the President of the Senegalese Music Society Abdul Aziz Dieng, who revealed to me that the then World Bank Country director was one of the most accomplished musician he had ever met. As I later learnt, he was not only a bass guitarist but also an ardent art connoisseur.

What changed in all these encounters? I developed a critical eye for art; became a better critic, art journalist or what can be generally summed as a better specialized writer.

Information exchange has continued to be central to date. We have managed to further strengthen the collaboration with the organizers that we were introduced to by Groupe 30 and the exchange in storylines and ideas has continued with for instance an invite that we got to be part of the editorial team that was charged with putting out a daily newsletter called *Aktu* during the 7th edition of the Dak'Art biennale of African Contemporary Art.

## **(5) More autonomy for more creativity**

*Author:* Patrick Mudekereza

*Activity:* workshop coordinated by Oumar Sall, from Groupe 30 Afrique, in the frame of the project "*Renforcement des compétences artistiques et professionnelles des métiers cultures en R D Congo*".

*Story collected by:* Claudia Fontes

*Date and Place:* October/November 2009 | by e-mail

In 2007, a workshop was held in Kinshasa to elaborate a project to create a platform. The workshop brought together eight cultural operators from eight different platforms of D.R. Congo; it was conducted by Oumar Sall from Group 30 and organized in the framework of the project 'Strengthening artistic and professional competencies of the cultural sector in D.R. Congo'.

It had two sessions. The first one was related to the study of our professional environment and the analysis of advantages and disadvantages when working in the formal sector; a second session concentrated on the presentation and exchanges of the various projects of the platforms attending.

I attended this workshop as general secretary for the Vicanos club, a collective of artists from Lubumbashi, D.R. Congo. This collective brought together more than sixty Lushois [from Lubumbashi] artists from all disciplines. It was founded in 1993 and it has really improved in the last years through projects of cooperation with associations and institutions from Africa and Europe.

Lubumbashi is a city of one and half million people but it remains isolated. At 2000 km away from Kinshasa, the two cities are linked only by plane. It goes without mentioning that the capital concentrates most of the cultural and artistic activities of the country.

The reopening of a French cultural centre in the city and the pragmatism of Hubert Maheux, its director at that time, helped to give visibility to the city and as a consequence, to our collective. How could we generate projects with a degree of consistency while inducing at the same time a development of our structure, of its members, and by the same token enable a real openness for Lubumbashi? How to reach a definition of objectives that could guide us in our choice of partnership and in finding the financial support? Those were the questions that the project towards a platform intended to answer.

This project was based on four main axes of work:

1-reinforcement of the capacities and professionalization,

2-coordination of a place for creation and dissemination,

3-definition of artistic priorities in relation to what artistic policies should we focus on (the visual arts: photography, video-art and cinema are the most defined in Lubumbashi and could bring the whole of our creations into an interdisciplinary logic),

4-work with greater visibility at both national and international level.

This project, though approved by the assembly of the Vicanos club, revealed real problems in the mode of operation of the club. During the four years I led the platform, I had encountered many burdens and much misunderstanding. By reformulating together the aims [of the platform] I better understood the points of divergence and we were able to reach a common position considering the various perspectives on the group.

The questions on professionalization and on stressing the actions on relevant disciplines were not accepted in plenary, so I had to quit the direction of the group. This project on the platform and the Forum-caravan for the Young citizen -the first European project financed in DRC in the cultural sector-, were my last collaborations as general secretary of the Vicanos club.

To better understand this change, you need to see it in conjunction with a professional choice that I had made a year before. I am an industrial chemist and my artistic action had always been a hobby. At the time Vicanos club was starting, it seemed relevant to me to get involved full-time in the projects, and that is what I did. I also decided to be professionally focused on the cultural sector and interrupt my career as engineer. That involvement was not only about writing (which is my passion), but also about conceptualising exhibitions, cultural management, cultural policies, etc. For this, it is necessary to rely on a platform, and for me, it had to be Vicanos club. This change has been painful and it nearly thwarted my pace. I think I lost a year of my life trying to refocus, but I also think that I have become more flexible and I gained autonomy. However, in general, I believe that this change has been significant and positive. It was made, with bitterness, but smoothly. It enabled me to understand the necessity of defining a professional framework without the restrictions that come with old-friend relationships. Having defined clearly my vision, I started a new platform with some artists and cultural operators, which refers beforehand to those objectives. The platform is called Picha ("image" in Swahili, the language spoken in the East of D.R. Congo). It gathers actors who are really involved in the cultural sector. There are seven members who were all part of the organizing team for the 'meetings on the image'. The objectives are at two levels:

-to participate in the development of the Katanga cultural sector (transversal development in terms of artistic disciplines, covering the strengthening of capacities in cultural actors, the debate on cultural policy, the economy of culture, etc.)

-to develop the creation around visual arts in order to make Lubumbashi become a creative pole for photography, cinema and video-art in Africa (artistic mission).

It is therefore open to all artists, with a focus on visual arts and moving image. Picha is chaired by Sammy Baloji, photographer and video artist, and I assist him as Secretary-General.

It is fascinating to start over with a new approach without pre-conceptions, to redefine one's references and base. In what respects to Sammy and I, deciding to work in Katanga is more than a strategic professional decision. Our actions only become meaningful in a given territory, but we had never wondered about this connection in the past.

Obviously, the question about resources is delicate. A young structure requires a considerable human and material investment knowing that it cannot receive any subsidy. We put in and we still put [money] from our own resources. We must gather funds to pay the rent of the workplace, the staff, the operations, etc. We need to put in a great personal effort, as well.

But investing in local creativity provides not only a double feeling –the personal fulfillment and the expression of our deep convictions-, but also allows us to take the voice of expression of a whole community, which grows and gets diversified each time there is an exchange, which revives one's faith in mankind.

#### Picha image meetings

Organized in June 2008 for the first edition, this event has been the driving force of the young artistic scene in Lubumbashi. The reasons for its success are the territorial coherence and international visibility. Its territorial link is manifested through the support to young talents: the photographers from the country who are new to the discipline had the opportunity to undergo training and refine their artistic approaches. It also manifests in the desire to create networks among artists from the same sector. The national network of the audiovisual (RENAV), an umbrella organization for the main initiatives dealing with audiovisual in the main four cities in the country, has been established during the professional meetings organized during the event. The participation of the audience at the different exhibition and screening spaces convinced us about a necessity that the cultural offer in Lubumbashi is not satisfying yet.

The international visibility was demonstrated by the selection of renowned artists from several countries. Many websites have portrayed the actions of this edition of the event and the international partners were satisfied with its progress.

That event had some significant consequences not only in the cultural life of the Lushois and Congolese, but also in the life of those who ran that project. It enabled Lubumbashi to confirm its position as a centre of great creative vitality in the field of the image, to revisit Congolese creation as a creation in full revival, and to discover new artists at the international level. This event also revealed the potential that lies in combining efforts for the benefit of all. We did not have any legal form at the time the event was held. The first edition was carried out by Vicanos club, our platform of origin, and the 'Halle de l'Etoile', a cultural institution in Lubumbashi.

From a personal point of view, it helped me to shape up the artistic objectives I intended to pursue. With Sammy Baloji, photographer and video artist, we created the Picha Association. It aims at developing the actions of the visual arts sector in general, including literature and the performing arts as contributors to stress those relevant issues which we intend to pursue following the event. Presenting images as testimonies of our history, of our questions, is more powerful than words alone. It means to offer the complexity of our deep feelings in a language that tries to be accessible to the feelings of others without make-up, and without imposing anything.

## L'ÉCOLE DES SABLES | Association JantBi

### (6) Yoon wi (the way)

*Author:* Ndeye Touty Daffé

*Activity:* Dance workshops at *Ecole des Sables*

*Story collected by:* Oumar Ndao

*Date and place:* 16 October | Toubab Dialaw, Senegal

My mother is disabled. She has struggled a lot for the well-being of her children and family. I used to see her early in the morning, waking up to go selling loaves of bread; she would stop for a short while to take a breath to then resume her way. This gave me a lot of courage to work hard in my life so that one day I could get her out of that unbearable situation I witnessed.

Toubab Dialaw did not have any high school so I studied at Bargny for 3 years and then one year in Rufisque. When mother died, I stopped my studies because of the lack of funds. I met my father some time just after I lost my mother; when I started to really getting to know my father, he fell ill, he is paralyzed and he is unable to talk at the moment.

In 2003 I entered the world of dance, which was my passion since I was a kid. I trained in traditional and contemporary dance. I danced with a dance company at Badé SOBO hotel located in Toubab Dialaw, where I came back when I stopped my studies. I had a boy in 2005. In 2008 I started with École des sables, where I was able to train a lot in traditional and contemporary dance. This opened my eyes to the world of dance.

Ecole des Sables has opened my eyes regarding "the discipline", life in community with other trainees but especially the attire of an artist in social life and on stage.

The [workshop] 'Tools of choreography' at Ecole des Sables between March and May 2009 gave me the ability to observe the dance with a different approach, which I did not have before. I used to think that dance was about beauty. Today, I have realized that it conveys messages, teaches lessons and gives testimonies...

The choreographic sense I learnt at that workshop is the core of my professional career. I am in charge of the artistic supervision of young boys and girls in my locality. This course has helped me [to develop] in choreography and in preparing the lessons I have to deliver.

This is the most significant change that I had in my artistic life with the little experience I have.

## (7) I questioned myself who I was

*Author* : Pierre Ànani Dodji Sanouvi

*Activity* : Workshop at *École des Sables*, 2005

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes

*Date and place* : October/November 2009, by e-mail

The most significant change that I experienced regarding the activities organized by *École des Sables*, was the fact of being chosen by the great Belgian choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker as her mentee in the programme 'The Rolex Mentor and Protege Arts initiative'. We were many students coming from *École des Sables*, nominated by Maman Germaine, and a lot more were coming from other parts of the world. I was chosen thanks to attending *École des Sables* and the work I was able to develop there.

*École des Sables* gave me the strength to believe in what I do as an African artist, the power of conviction on a development, an innovation, the conviction of what I can bring to the world with the dances I inherited from my forefathers, and what the world will be able to give me thanks to that. The rooting [in traditions] and the openness to the world. Above all, [it gave me] a very personal sense of determination, which I hadn't before.

This change was significant indeed because of the fact that I questioned myself who I was, which I hadn't done really before attending *École des Sables*. I did not ask myself why I danced so well, I just danced, without being worried about what I could use the dance for and what the dance could use me and my people for in terms of awareness, discipline, freedom and socio-cultural development. Today I feel like a heavy responsibility, through the world. (Maybe too much, but I feel deeply and truly about this).

The fact of being chosen by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker as her mentee was surely significant at the international level, but also because it was a personal event, an opportunity to learn and compare, which enabled me to have a clear vision of my thoughts, my doubts, and my concerns. It worked, because that event enabled me to have my own language, a clear global vision, a very precise goal starting from the dances of my forefathers.

I noticed some basic needs between the West and Africa regarding socio-cultural development:

### For Europe

I noticed the coldness in the faces, in the lifestyle, in the tram and the subways. The 'hello' in the morning, which is mumbled, just because it is that time of the day, though is not pronounced with real energy to start the day. In the offices, the lack of life and [the lack of] human warmth, it was all over the place! A voice in my head asked the question, 'how can you dance in such an atmosphere?????' I ended up by subconsciously feeling developing a skin-illness where I used to live, although I was proud of my career, professionally speaking.

Now, the observation, the study, the deep analysis, the respect, of the dance of our forefathers which takes place at the *École des sables*, where the dance is performed in its pure form or in a form that emanates from that type of information... To perform these dances contributes to heal all sorts of evil and pain; that could be quoted high. In general dance is healing. The proof is that after several hours of repetitions, on my own in the studio for the dance piece 'Music for Pieces of Woods' a music piece by Steeve Reich, whose musical rhythms are those of the *Éwé* from the West Africa, the ethnic group to which I belong to in Togo, after enjoying all those moments in the studio, I always found myself at the end of the rehearsal with a huge smile, I was happy with my dance, which was opposite to the [values of the] system and lifestyle of the society where I was. I think that people did not understand me, but well ...! I did not understand myself there either...

Another trigger was that after delivering some courses on African dance in Brussels, under my own initiative, following the research done on our dances and the convictions born at *École des Sables*, I collected some feedback from the European participants. They referred to the positive impact that those dances and rhythms provided and continue to provide (for I am still teaching in the same manner) to their every-day lives. Nowadays that impact is huge and relevant and it contributes to a healthier society in Europe. Here is were I am able to bring my contribution in ...

### For Africa

I simply confirmed that the activities, studies carried out at the *École des Sables* were huge on our dances, they have created dancers able to represent, preserve the strength coming from the depths of what is

sacred, from spirituality, from the reflections on this pure and ancient civilization. A civilization that attempts more or less to get modernized, which is not completely wrong, but the way it is being done, I find it damaging. The way this process is imposed and has to be accepted 100%, in my modest view, will take us to perdition. I met a lot of Africans in Europe, in Belgium, who have become more European than the Europeans themselves because they are adopting the habits of the European culture, taken to be 'the best' to become 'civilized' and as consequence they undermine our culture, considered 'primitive'.

I think that to integrate yourself does not necessarily mean that you need to be transformed. These people [Africans he met in Europe] they do no longer believe in what we have back home. We know the reason why, but that does not mean that you are going to deny who you are, drop the values and the respect for the elders, in exchange for the modern world –and I certainly do not know where this modernity is leading us. On the other hand, [we need] to preserve and be aware of the traditions, the morals, the wisdom, and the knowledge of the elders, to improve the conditions of life. In this, I believe firmly. With this belief, we can do a lot of things in Africa when working with dance towards the cultural-social development.

I can understand very well that an African, as black as me, refuses that I call her my sister, as it happened to me in Brussels, because we did not know each other, she was born in Belgium... But then, what has become of the socio-cultural education of the place where her parents come from? The history of the colour of her black skin, coming probably from Congo Kinshasa, or Brazzaville (I am not sure but judging by the very strong accent of her French, she was surely from that region, from Congo). In any case, that is where the whole thing got started. I told myself that I needed to do something.

I have to recover the following phrase that come to my mind all the time, both from the mouth and the mind of 'MamPa Germuth [Maman Germaine and Papa Helmut) who used to say 'be proud of yourselves, be open to the world, and the world will be open to you, but when you embrace the world never forget where you come from'. To that, Sanouvi adds 'Not only we need to know where we come from so that we do not get lost in the world, but also where we come from to bring a contribution, thanks to the knowledge, the science, the alchemy, the harmony, the balance, the sharing, the giving and receiving, that exists largely in the different forms of arts, religions, and the traditional heritage which we inherited from our forefathers'.

All that gave me the zeal to establish a house in Togo 'The Tools of Wisdom' where the dance will serve the socio-cultural education, the preservation, the research, the deepening, the valorization, the revalorization, etc. ...

For that reason I created and put in place a process of formation to reach the task that has to be done over there, so that we can develop the creation of dance events according to what we want, and in the way we want to say it. It will enable traditional dancers to not only express themselves artistically to the world, through whatever we possess, but also they will be able to make a living from their art. That is not easy, but the proof is that today I live from my dance, thanks to the wake-up call, the determination, and the work experienced at École des Sables. I succeeded in taking care of the education of my younger brother, and of my nieces and nephews in Togo.

I know that establishing such a house will contribute a lot to the potential already existing in Africa, to benefit from that knowledge, respect it, to express it through the dance in order to contribute positively to the well-being of the community where this house will be.

## **(8) The desire to speak with the dance of my forefathers**

*Author* : Pierre Ànani Dodji Sanouvi

*Activity* : Artist residence in Belgium in the frame of the 'Rolex Mentor and Protégée Arts Initiative', with Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker.

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes

*Date and place* : October/November 2009, by e-mail

The contemporary dance world is very vast; the West has monopolized it, by putting laws, rules, and prohibitions... Which is all right to achieve a better result, in short, for good things... But [what happens] when it is about opening-up and getting curious about the way that equal people, practicing the same discipline, express themselves when they come from cultures totally different to the Western culture?

I bring up those questions here because those same questions enabled me to understand and realize what my language was.

With Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker we worked on a musical piece called 'Music for pieces of wood'; as I explained it earlier on, that music is from the ethnic group Éwé. Being a son of Éwés, the memory of my body cannot do anything else apart from responding to what the rhythm tells me... So, you need to shake the body with very ethnic and African movements. That was the remark that Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker did on my movements one day. She sometimes found that the steps I used were not adequate to the work related to the show. Moreover they were not in conformity with the other performances under the same register. True, those steps were not clear enough for the circumstance. As far as I am concerned she only confirmed the reason for which I wanted to develop those steps... Those steps did not correspond with her European conception of the dance and rhythm.

I told myself, it is necessary to show what I am really capable of doing. I needed to show that that was my way of dancing, my language, ethnic or African, whatever the movements they were, they make who I am. As soon as the consideration, the understanding of the origins of those steps made sense to me, and taking into account the remarks of my mentor Anne T.D.K, I understood her way of building, of writing her work, her choreographies on the music.

That brilliant and unique manner she has of doing it, which strongly depends on mathematics, geometry, the musical architecture, etc...

I confirmed and noticed that in our dances back home we have all that but in a different way, that's all. For me, my approach and hers are complementary on the plan of gestures and movement, but the dance from my place is also a matter of religion that is the big difference; that is all. Therefore, these moments of creation of this piece really reinforced my convictions, helped me to grow. They made me responsible of the dance I do and the dance I will do in the future, made me feel responsible of the desire to speak through the dance of my forefathers, about what is going on with my religion and my culture back home, for the rest of my life...

As a drawback, I could mention that this very strong way of studying dance has trained me to create dance for the stage in a very specific manner that does not really abide by the laws of the choreographic writing established by the Europeans long ago. My way of performing dance is rooted in the philosophy, thoughts, in African and sometimes Asian customs, and this has not helped me to find a place in the theaters and Western population yet. I think it is time that we are included in the Academies and Universities of dance, to teach what we do.

The standard theaters where the audience sits facing the stage do not go with me. I mean, the concept of "frontal" does not exist really for us, [we use] a lot more circular and spiral movements in the essential and pure forms of dance. I use them in the dances that I perform, but at the end of the day they are presented in a theater with a frontal stage and where everything is regulated by established rules. Therefore, there is, systematically, a problem to properly appreciate the moment, the dance, and its intrinsic value. This habit of visualization makes dance to provide marks, which do not exist in what I do.

Then for me I found a very simple common ground for the dances that I do and perform. I do not dance 'choreographies', I perform dances. Instead of trying to 'read' the choreography whilst the dance is being performed, I rather open myself to what needs to be done at the moment it needs to be done... To perform this way brings me lots of complications. I perfectly understand that.

Then I concluded that in the case of choreographies where there are established visual rules, instead of [your body] experiencing dance, it is the intellect that weighs much more than anything else. However, I find that it is necessary to achieve a sort of equilibrium amongst intellect, sensibility, and spirituality. It is just my personal opinion.

That drawback takes me to persist in my process, in order to get myself well-grounded. This is one of those reasons for which I would like to perform again that dance piece 'ADJA', which I performed in Cotonou, in Bénin last year. It was financed by Rolex with the support of Rosas.

As I mentioned earlier on I set up a very simple process. Twenty per cent of the process emanates from Western thoughts, and eighty per cent derives from the thoughts and religion behind ethnic dance. That is

what École des Sables created. I am proud of that even though it is difficult to follow this way today. I believe in this with all my soul, for I have a precise objective, a precise goal, a clear vision. I need a place to work, to express myself, we need a space to express ourselves, time to reflect on these matters, which are very heavy.

A request was done for a laboratory at École des Sables to take place for a month and half, so that we can think together, and we can realize what we have become thanks to our studies. We need to find out what is it that the Acogny technique has generated at École des Sables, to defend ourselves better, to valorise our own art, our dances, and the thoughts of our forefathers. We need to know what is the best way to contribute with our knowledge to the society either in Europe or in Africa; it is necessary to be aware of that, especially for the coming generations.

Only by thinking together we will find a way to communicate, but before that it is necessary that École des Sables realizes what we have become today, in contrast to what we were, so that we can show the traditional dancer the way that we all have to use. We all have our pride, but only with our participation and the input of École des Sables where we belong, we will be able to reunify things.

I don't mean that whatever I have said is an absolute true, but deeply in me this is what I live, what I think, what I dance.

For me it is real, I know where I come from and I know where I am going...

## **(9) To create a new storyline without losing your basic roots**

*Author:* Jemal Junaid

*Activity:* Jemal Junaid has been involved with Ecole des Sables at three stages. - In 2002 'Enracinement et Ouverture' [Rooting and opening up]- In 2003 'Le Temps / Nature et Technologie' [The times/Nature and technology] - In 2007, Meetingn of African Diaspora amongst choreographers and musicians: 'Rencontre - Confrontation – Echange' [Meeting, confrontation, exchange]

*Story collected by:* Claudia Fontes

*Date and place :* October/November 2009, by e-mail

[My story of change] starts by meeting mama Germaine Acogny in my city town Addis Ababa, when I was 14; she was coming to perform here in Addis. When she heard about our company Adugna, she contacted our company to give classes for us; when she first appeared into our company compound, it was a really surprising prance, full of energy and confidence on what she could do to give us concrete ideas on using our roots.

It was more teaching us how to believe on the richness of our roots and traditions, and how to use these to experiment and dig more on our buss. She also taught us Acogny techniques as a model of how to use our traditional dance and other training background to search and create our own techniques.

Mama Germaine asked my dance teachers Royston Maldum and Mags Byrne -who were from the UK-, [for permission] to take me to Senegal for more training on this basic idea, but as I heard I was refused to go to Senegal by my teachers because of my training in Addis, and it was on a good will.

Mama Germaine has invited me to Senegal after I finished my 5 years training with Adugna, and I went there.

Starting from the place, it is very much inspiring, refreshing and very, very good to concentrate on your work, and also very natural, full of nature and life, it is energetic and it is a place where you can easily have spiritual connection with nature; all these things had a very big input playing on me there, apart from the training.

The training was very rich on the concept of showing how African culture tradition and different languages relate to each other and with the nature; it was very strong and I fully understood it.

It was very easy to communicate with each other through body language and dance, and to share the differences that we had on our traditional dances, and to hear how and why this traditional dances have been created. Every single second was important to me, including the time out of training, because I could learn new things from different people from different parts of Africa. I was very happy but also stressed about how to get the most out of it. It was unbelievable rich.

The experience that I got from the cultural/ artistic event was, the more than you know about yourself - meaning about your culture, tradition, environments, the spirit of your bass, and also the feelings of your people in your country-, the more confident, truthful, strong and creative you will be, because that is what you know the most, that is also what you can do the best, and it will be very strong because you will be telling the storyline that you want to pass [but also the story] that you are living on.

The cultural exchange with the other countries was also very significative [because we could] see the discipline of the cultural environment in respect to the story. It is very good to learn about the environment, and also the discipline, with the story, to open your mind on how to mirage it with your own culture, to create a new storyline without losing your basic roots. That is also a very good way of creating a new and untouched technique or movements and a new story; it is a very good way for transforming the contemporary creativity as well.

I am now using these very important tools wherever I go to teach or choreograph; these are absolutely very successful tools for me.

After seeing me on the first workshop, Mama Germaine has encouraged me to tell [a story] from what she saw during that workshop, to do a new creation with the input of what I learned from Ecole des Sables. I created a dance piece called Yemot Guzo, which means "The journey of death". I created it after my grandfather's death; the movements of that piece were almost created by influence of the strong tools that I learnt during the training at Ecole des Sables.

Since then, that dance piece has been performed in different places and I also re-created it in England 3 months ago and toured around the UK with it. Yemot Guzo had played a big part in letting me to be the winner of the Rolex Mentor and Protégé Art Interactive Award in 2004. Since then I have worked with different big companies like Jant-Bi / Ecole des sables from Senegal, Karas Company from Japan, Kobily Kane company from France, and Dance United -an English company-; this last one is the company who created our company Adugna in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. I have travelled to a lot of places around the world using these strong and helpful tools, besides the basic training that I got with Adugna.

## **(10) "Imagination will take you far, but your personal truth will carry you even further."**

*Author* : Margaret Makoka

*Activity* : Workshop at École des Sables in 2005.

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes

*Date and place* : interview made by e-mail in October/November 2009

The first time I was at École des Sables was in 2005 attending a workshop for three months. This workshop gathered about 16 African nations all for one common interest, dance. This was the first time in my life that I was exposed to so many people and to so many nations at the same time. I started off my career in 1998, at Pretoria Technicon in South Africa. I studied musical theatre, which had a bit of everything, from dance to drama, music, costume design, technical training, production design and performance. The one thing that I was not taught was the great role African dance and tradition play in every African artist life. It affects the way you create your works, it affects your interpretation to the world around you and how you phrase this into dance

I am originaly a Malawian, my family relocated in South Africa when I was 9 years old; it was not an easy transformation as the black South African culture was totally different to the culture I was used to back home.

Being in this country, I have found myself learning about different tribes that are here and found myself knowing lesser and lesser of my own traditions.

Today it is very hard to be absorbed in tradition as we have too much Western influence as well as Christianity. I grew up in a Christian home where certain traditional practices were observed and others shaned. Those that were practiced were an order and not explained; I took part in events not knowing what they mean or why we had to practice them (they are rituals). I then moved from Malawi, my homeland, to South Africa where I have grown and adopted most of culture and traditions of other people because I did not know those from my homeland. I am a Nkhokhola who lives like a Sotho, sometimes a Zulu, or Venda or Ndebele. I have a questionable identity where I know more of other tribal rituals and cultural social structure than I could ever acknowledge my own. Growing up in school, I chose not to answer when people needed to know more of my culture or traditions of my homeland. I had no answers and my parents did not share this information. I would pass myself as a Sotho or a Venda person. When I started contemporary dance in 2005, these questions rose again only this time I could not ignore them, I had to face the reality: I am a foreign resident in South Africa and need to know my tradition and that of others; develop a mutual respect and opinion of who they are why they are the way they are; understand why we are all African yet so different.

You see, in dance imagination will take you far but your personal truth will carry you even further.

Before the workshop in 2005, I actually didn't care, I had people telling me things like I don't have strong grounding, or I behave like a white girl, just though they were being nasty. The workshop I attended helped me to see the importance of acknowledging who you are, knowing your roots and having an identity, it not only uplifts your understanding of the world around you, but you also get the opportunity to self-search and find the answers to the questions you have or chosen not to confront.

This was meaningful because I have developed not only an interest in creating African contemporary work, but I transfer the lessons I learnt to my students, so that no matter what nationality they are, they are able to know the importance of knowing yourself, where you are from; having an identity keeps one strong and focused. This is because of all the multi-cultures I met at this workshop, exchanging our cultures, experiences and hopes, dreams and needs.

We Africans are so far apart yet so similar. We almost are like closed books. To actually have a few days like three months in one location and sharing the same interest is the most amazing thing I have ever experienced and this has stayed with me every single day of my life. If every African could get a chance like this, Africa would unite and stop the fighting and tyranny.

## **(11) If we dance at the same pace, it means we speak the same language!**

*Author* : Taïgue Ahmet

*Activity* : workshop at *École des Sables*

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes

*Date and place*: Dialogue by e-mail, October/November 2009

I am Taïgue Ahmed; I was born in Ndjamena, in Chad, on 19 July 1977. I am a dancer and choreographer, I chose dance as a mean of education because not everyone has the right to go to school, considering the fact that the parents cannot afford to register us.

When I was a child in the village there was a war between the former president François Ngarta Tombalbai and the rebels of Hisssein Habré who had taken over power. The chief of François' army, who had left, hid himself in my village in the south of Chad; therefore the rebels of Hisssein killed thousands of people including the baby-boys in order to avenge themselves. My mother disguised me as a baby-girl to save me, my tutor was killed and that story touched me a lot, I was then 3 years old.

At the age of 13 I was in school when a choreographer came and asked the students who would like to dance, and I was the first one to raise my hand. While learning traditional dance I recovered my smile while

dancing with others, while dancing on the same movements all together, while holding the hands of others, that made me one with the children of all ethnic groups in my country.

After five years in dance my parents did not want me to carry on with my studies. After graduating in science from high school, they could not afford to send me to the university in Chad. It is difficult to enter university if your parents are not well placed, so I returned to dance as it was my first choice.

I danced in a company called "The Young Tréteaux", the contemporary dance company of Julie Dossavi in France, but this was not yet what I wanted to do through dance, for me dance is a vehicle for messages to be transmitted!

Once I returned from a tour in Paris to Chad in 2005, and while walking in the neighborhood, I saw the students of the "Non-Violence" school who were fighting; they were playing to do karate in the school yard, imitating the military officers, and they were throwing stones to each other, in spite of the school being called "Non-Violence".

I created a company of contemporary dance called GO, with dancer Nadjitessem Gaondi, a German saxophonist called Marc Faestin, and an administrator, Tai Dieudonné. We created a play called "Non-violence" and I screened it for the students in this school; afterwards, I proposed some courses for them in the afternoon. Many among them took the dance course. Every two weeks we give them the drums and the balafon during the break and that changed their ideas of violence. This project really inspired me to continue but I do not have the means to do the same in other schools.

Later I wrote a second project to give dance courses to support peace and non-violence issues in the refugee camps of Darfur. I contacted the high commissioner for refugees (HCR) in order to gain access to the camps with my project. They read the content of the project and they found it quite interesting. I was told that the organization had no financial means to support our project, nevertheless we could go and try a pilot, and if things worked out well, they would find a solution. I left to the camps in the South of Chad where the Central African Republic refugees were, instead of Darfur; I worked in two camps, Amboko and Gondjé, with a percussionist who played while I danced for the refugees.

After a week dancing, I sent a list around and a lot of them registered in: 181 from Amboko and 76 from Gondjé. I brought the list to Ndjamena to the HCR office a week later. Three months later the refugees requested that I set off again to give them training, the HCR called me, they gave me logistics like drums and other materials, and I set off again with my percussionist of the Bedjilla Maurice Band. We spent a month training them and telling them about hygiene at the same time; the refugees feel like being in prison, so they say, we should take a bath to go where? They get skin diseases. We also encouraged the ban on white weapons and we talked how the ethnic conflict could be sorted out through dancing: if we dance at the same pace, that means that we speak the same language!

Dance is universal, it does not belong to any ethnia or border. We talk as well of HIV awareness and family planning - refugees want to have a lot of children to receive more rations. We also advise the youngsters to protect themselves so that they can achieve a professional career in dance. We show them videos of the girls from the national ballet performing during a show, to transport them back to their culture.

Six months later I organized a meeting with the youth from Goé, an autochthonous village. We also trained them, we performed a show entitled 'Co-habitation'. A year later, we created the festival Ndamsena from 1 to the 7 October 2007 where the refugees were able to meet the dancers from the national ballet of Chad and from other private companies so they could have a reference, had the opportunity to mingle and exchange with others, and show their dance to the audience of Ndamsena.

In order to continue my education, I applied to École des Sables in Toubab-Dialaw and they chose me. I went in for a training-course on contemporary African dance; that training gave me a bigger openness, it opened my spirit and I learnt lots of things. To start with, the fact [everyone was] coming from different countries, and the exchange on heritage dances; all these immense cultural wealth touched me so much. I received the tools to deconstruct African traditional dance, the techniques of Germaine Acogny, which are based on materials from Africa. This technique and other courses I followed at the École have really given me a structure, they have built me indeed.

When I went back to my country I taught the African contemporary dance to the refugees so that they could express themselves through dance instead of getting hold of weapons again to avenge themselves. The tools I received from Germaine Acogny and from other teachers at École des Sables are very efficient. Those tools of the African contemporary dance enabled me to make the refugee-dancers understand that the revolt is not only by the weapons, but through body language! When the body lives these circumstances of war and violence, it not only needs to eat, to drink, or to be healed! It also needs to speak to someone. But as a person, you, alone, cannot talk to the world because no one will listen to you unless of course you are a celebrity. So, as far as I am concerned, the best way to express oneself and to get wounds healed is dancing. The tools I received from Germaine Acogny helped me to create their dances related to themes that enabled them to express themselves through their movement in front of the spectators who now understand them. This changed their negative approach. Now at least they were able to reveal what hurts and worries

them the most through the dance. It enabled them to meet other dancers and have some positive exchange with them. Those are my reasons.

After discussing with Maman Germaine Acogny, she advised me to take a training-course on the pedagogy of dance at the National Dance Center in Paris, more precisely in Pantin, a three-month course. Once back, I transmitted whatever I learnt to the dancers in my country. The French Cultural Center of Ndjamena sponsored that training.

In 2007, I created an association in Ndamsena called "Let us Dance Together". With the association we continued working in the camps and also in a few cities in Chad.

The children in my country dream to become army men in order to kill and enrich themselves. That's why there are so many child-soldiers. With the association in 2010 we will initiate some projects in some provinces to educate them through dance, encouraging them to go back to school. If our partner helps us, we will go to the Darfur camps in 2010.

Currently I am at a creation residency in Paris, under the theme 'Crache Mon Histoire' (Spit My History) at the National Dance Center in Pantin while living at the Cité Internationale des Arts. I took a "visa for creation". I will return to Chad on 3 January 2010, where my Association continues the work in the meantime.

## AFRICA CINEMA DE QUARTIER

### **(12) This training gave me the desire to engage further in the dissemination, through cinema, of our culture and traditions**

*Author* : Koné Lassina

*Activity* : competition organised by Africa Cinema de Quartier to train in documentary filmmaking.

*Story collected by* : This story was submitted by video (there was no interview).

*Date and place* : Dakar, 15 October 2009

I am here today thanks to a contest organized by "Africa Cinéma de Quartier" in April 2009 to train young Senegalese, young Africans in the field of audio-visual arts. I applied and was lucky to come out first out of fifteen selected candidates. So, after the contest we underwent training in documentary filmmaking. We learnt many things during the four to five months of free training that we had here, such as film shooting techniques, sound recording techniques, editing techniques. Our training was meant to finish with the production or the making of a documentary film.

For this reason, I can say that I have experienced a significant change because in the past, I would never have thought not even for a minute that I was able to do such a thing, but due to Africa Cinema de Quartier, that's what I've done.

During the training, I think it was in June 2009, we were invited to participate in a workshop on "The aesthetics in cinema". I must confess it was a topic that didn't say much to me before, though I used to watch television or go to the cinema in a way an inexperienced person would. A Canadian filmmaker called Nelson Henricks was invited to that workshop. We learnt a lot of things. We knew that we learnt plenty of things in relation to aesthetics. The different contributions from all sides enriched us and I really keep a deep remembrance of that event.

That training enabled us to acquire an essential tool, though in a superficial manner, about audio-visual in general and cinema in particular. And for me, the promotion of our overall values as African people is primarily the duty of all sons and daughters of this continent, who, without an adequate training, could hardly be able to show them to the rest of the world.

So, that training gave me the desire to commit myself deeply, through cinema, to show our culture and traditions, to criticise our daily behaviour and our relationships with the rest of the world.

At this moment, as I am talking to you, I am preparing a trip; let me rather say that the trip is already prepared, I am going to Morocco. It is an extension of the training I undertook here; I took part in an international contest, and I was selected. I must continue my training in documentary and fictional filmmaking

at ESAV [*École Supérieure des Art Visuels*] in Marrakech, an international school. Three people were selected and out of these three, two came from here.

So, I can say that without the training we received at Africa Cinema de Quartier, we would not probably be at this level today, or even, maybe I would not be making cinema or I would not be trying to improve my level.

So, I would like "Africa Cinema de Quartier" to continue their activities. It is true that there are some loopholes, some weaknesses that must be corrected so as to be able to train young people who could meet the demands of tomorrow's world of audio-visual.

I think it is a matter of financing. When money is available on a permanent basis, it is possible; without great resources, we can try to work out things in one way or the other. But if there are resources, you can attain your goal; because ESAV, the school I am joining today, has really huge resources, so they can achieve their objectives very well. But it is extremely difficult for somebody to obtain something without the required resources. So, we were fifteen people for that training here, thanks to "Africa Cinema de Quartier" and these fifteen people had an insignificant number of cameras. Or, for example, if there are 20, 30 cameras or 40 cameras on the editing desk, there is no problem because there are 17 editing suites. But in what respects to filming equipment, I think great efforts should be made.

They must try to equip the school with last-generation educational material: I mean video library, why not a studio, and so on and so forth, so that the young learners will be well trained for the profession they have chosen.

### **(13) I had a passion, but I did not have a framework to express myself**

*Author* : Aïstou DIA

*Activity* : competition organised by Africa Cinema de Quartier to train in documentary filmmaking

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes

*Date and place* : 16 October 2009 | Toubab Dialaw, Senegal

My name is AÏCHA, I am 38 years old and I am a mother of three children, a daughter and two sons.

It has been a long passion between cinema and me. As a teenager, I already dreamt of going to USA to learn film...this was in the eighties.

Very soon, I was initiated to Western and African literature; this enabled me to have an appreciation of these civilizations. Nevertheless, I realized I had a passion for documentary films through television, which made me travel from one continent to another, from one civilization to another, all of them so enriching for my intellect.

After some IT training and studying hotel and tourism management, my first son was born three months later. At that time, I got some short contracts with companies. But I also found myself taking care of a household and after the birth of my daughter in 2003 and my second son in 2005, I was compelled to do everything for my children. I gave the maximum and the best of my time to them, confined in a daily routine which was mostly monotonous and above all, restraining.

Sometimes, I used to hide myself in the bathrooms or the bedroom to cry silently because I could not express myself; I had neither the opportunity nor a framework.

Things went on like that till the day I saw on a local TV channel the possibility to take part in a contest about documentary filmmaking. I applied and passed. ESMA was an opportunity I seized in 2009. I was selected 6 months ago amongst fifteen.

It was a great surprise for me. With that training at ESMA, I have the possibility to practice my passion a bit. Movie making, creating.... My life started to take shape and meaning again. I live 16 km away from Dakar centre, but I made every effort to be constantly present during all the training. Despite my family commitments, (taking care of children the morning before their departure for school, and in the evening after they returned, looking after them during weekends, etc...), I used to leave home at 7 o'clock in the morning and come back at 11pm in the evening, but the most important thing for me was that I was practicing my passion, I was expressing myself at last !

I had a passion, but I did not have a framework of expression. After 6 months, I must say that this training enabled me to better understand, to better grasp the field of image. Through the film we are producing at the school, it enabled me to conceptualize themes that I love and which have all in relation to society, the daily life of a certain fringe of the Senegalese society, almost abandoned by the country's authorities.

For that film, I was dealing with families who gathered in schools... primary schools..., families victims of the floods, who don't have any other place to go and who are compelled to move to nearby primary schools'

classrooms, in Thiaroye, the military barracks of Thiaroye. We spent 4 days there with those families; we followed them... Their living conditions... We even went back to their original place. We could see their houses completely devastated by the waters; dirty water... the groundwater levelling up... Every morning when women wake up, they go back to these houses to evacuate water. In the afternoon, the water climbs up again to the same level. These are very hard life conditions. Being very sensitive to social issues, it is really something that interested me a lot... To show to people that with images you can express many things, but over all, it is beautiful... There are too many things over there... That people take more care of the social aspects, the living conditions of that population.

Now, I am preparing a project. I am in an Islamic Institute, Mosdair, which works a lot in the social field: building of schools, sanitary structures in the South of the country, in the districts of Velingara, Dahra Diolof, in the most remote places of this country and surely the poorest places. So in learning the method to visualize, realize, to conceptualize a documentary film, this will enable me later on to speak, to really be able to express myself. There are many political, social and economic activities that this institute carries out, but many people do not know that. For most people, Senegal means Dakar. Whereas everything happens elsewhere: the priorities are elsewhere, the wealth is elsewhere... If you see Dakar on the map of Senegal, you will easily understand what I am talking about. So, the South is amongst the poorest regions. The person who is managing that NGO is taking care of more than 400 families over there. He is really sponsoring the agriculture and animal rearing sector. Conceptualizing this kind of things is really urgent in this country... That people learn to act and to think on a social basis.

Personally, I find it very important, because I ask myself about the world I live in. People who perhaps have a little bit more and people who have less... This notion of sharing and that of a certain well-being, a certain level of life that must be obtained but which does not exist in that part of the country. The degradation I have experienced throughout my life... I am bothered..., I am hurt... I am not feeling at ease in this country. There are no proper living conditions and besides, everyone who lives in better conditions should be conscious of the fact that, there are at least ten others who don't enjoy the same situation. People should learn to work together, to build a certain comfort for a better being. This is my aspiration. This is social... It is the social aspect.

The most significant change for me comes from the esteem and admiration that my children show to me. Especially the eldest who is 11 years old and who is never tired of praising my courage and bravery to his friends; he never stops encouraging me to go forward...

## **(14) Words on their own are not explicit enough, images are necessary as well**

*Author* : Ndiawar Sarr

*Activity* : Course in documentary making of Africa Cinema de Quartier, 2009

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes and Oumar Ndao

*Date and place*: 16 October 2009 | Toubab Dialaw, Senegal

A tragic event motivated me to do cinema. Towards 2000 I had a girl-friend who I loved very much. I even wished to be with her for the rest of my life. Unfortunately, she left me early. She died on 26 September 2002 during the sinking of the 'Djola' boat. It really upset me to a point that I almost lost all references at both professional and religious levels.

When the disaster occurred, I spent two days wondering whether she was dead or alive. At the end, I saw a picture of her corpse at Dakar town hall. The next day, I went to the marine buildings where corpses were in containers and there, I could identify her body. When I saw all these bodies growing pale in the container, it was really horrible; it was unthinkable; it was indescribable. Any time I talk about that story, I say that if you have not gone to these containers, you cannot imagine the damage caused by that Djola boat.

I felt so bad and it became something that I kept for myself; I could not express it. It tormented me, I remained at least two years suffering the martyrdom; it was something I wanted to express but words were not enough; well, I wanted to translate it into images.

I wanted to take courses in framing and sound, so that one day I would be able to tell my story through images. I entered the Media Centre, not as a filmmaking student, but as a technician, because at that time I was a technician in electronics. I did not have resources to pay my training charges. But the fact of being inside and seeing people at work enabled me to learn something from the small corner where I stood.

Since I started attending the Media Centre Dakar, many things have changed in my life. The first change that I have personally noticed was my way of looking and seeing things.

After learning cinema with Media Centre of Dakar, I have become another Ndiawar, because I could no longer see and hear the same way I used to before starting attending the Media Centre. Through the workshops that we had, they taught us how to see with the camera and to listen through it.

With a camera, we can do as much good as we can do the contrary too. In my current life, each of my glances has become a frame, a shot or a sequence of shots. Every night in bed, before sleeping, I meditate on everything around me. Any time something happens, I feel like taking a camera to give my point of view. Through the training I received at Media Centre, today I can give my point of view about everything around me.

At last, I started courses in filmmaking with the coming of FMA in collaboration with "Africa Cinéma de Quartier". We underwent a 6 months training which has just ended, so, we are at the end of the training. We are making the films to seal the end of our training.

For instance, I am currently working on two (2) film projects.

#### Social Campus or Ghetto

University Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar. Housing problems met by students nowadays.

This is a project that I am working on, because I have attended Cheikh Anta Diop University, the Science Faculty, at the Department of New Sciences. I am still at that university, but just as a course employee; I work on courses. It is a situation over there, to which my junior brothers and sisters are confronted too. I was at this university in 1997, but from 1997 to now, the number of students increased by threefold if not by fourfold because we have even gone beyond 70 000 students. Officially, there are 5 000 beds for all these people. If we calculate that ratio, we will have 14 students per bed. This is dreadful, distressing. You can imagine a bedroom, suited for 3 students taking up to 15; and you know what it implies as promiscuity. Yet, we are told that forty per cent of the State budget is allocated to education.

#### Cry of distress

It is a survey of cases of diseases caused by flood, mainly malaria, cholera...

The victim population are powerless, they live in water with all their families and are exposed to them. We know that stagnant waters is where mosquitos proliferate, increasing the development of cholera... Malaria is the first cause of death in Sénégal; it is a critical look on flood in outskirts, a sanitary and urban hazard. Recently, I went to Djina Rouaye, in the outskirts of Dakar. I found a house, which was totally flooded and deserted by its occupants. I could not go inside it, there was water, and I did not have my high boots. Then, I climbed up a wall to take pictures. When I finished, while I was leaving, a woman called me and told me that this house belonged to her. I answered that there was no problem and that I was just taking some pictures of the water. She told me that she had not received any of the support that the State has given in relation to the AFSEC plan. She is a real flood victim. Although this lady did not know me, she put her hope on me. She thought that I had come to solve her problems. That touched me a lot. I explained to her that I was a student and that I wanted to make a film on that stuff. Her story impressed me so deeply that I even decided to make the film on her, on her case.

She told me that her neighbours gave her a room where she currently lives with all her family; that is to say with all her children. I asked permission to visit her room; she accepted. I went into it; I saw the room. The scene was distressful; there was water in her new dwelling place; but at least that new place was better than her old house. I spent two days with them. After that I fell sick. I tell you that there were unimaginable things over there.

My passion was to make cinema. For a long time I cherished that idea but I did not have financial means to pay for the training. But thanks to Media Centre, I got it through a subsidised programme.

You know, we are in Dakar, and we know all the social problems linked to Dakar. All students, and this is my own opinion, want to have accommodation at the campus because of transport difficulties. I think that every student wishes to have a room at the campus. I don't know if I have answered your question; but this is my opinion.

I made a survey, or at least, I had discussions with many foreign students; I went to their rooms and we discussed during tea-time; we talked about their problems. From what I understood in those discussions, all of them wish to have accommodation at the campus.

To enter this profession you need a lot of resources. Training charges alone amount to 750 000 CFA Francs and with the current economic crisis it is not everybody who can afford that sum of money. For our training, the minimum amount is 750 000 CFA francs. We have been here maybe by the help of the partnership between KAYE, Africa Cinéma de Quartier, with the DOEN Foundation; we had the opportunity to do that training.

We were many who were selected through a contest. But 15 of us were selected out of all these people.

Maybe I was lucky to be among the selected ones; so were my other fellows. But it was not easy at all. You

see, I came to Media Centre in 2002, and it was only in 2009 that I started studying cinema on an official basis. Then, funds are required. It is an exciting job but it requires financial resources. I have chosen this profession so that I will be able to give my point of view. Image has a language; spoken words only are not sufficient to express that, image is required too.

## **(15) I found my way**

*Author* : Ngone DIOP

*Activity*: Documentary making course by Africa Cinema de Quartier 2009

*Story collected by* : Oumar Ndao | Transcription by Fatime Faye

*Date and place* : 16 October 2009 | Toubab Dialaw, Senegal

My name is Ngoné Diop. I come from the south, from Thiès. I am Senegalese and Thièsene. I live in Dakar since 2004, after graduating from high school and having entered the Faculty of Law at Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar. At the same time I attend ESMA where I take courses in documentary filmmaking thanks to a contest organised by Africa Cinéma de Quartier, who subsidizes the course.

I came to Dakar to study law. But I must say that before, when I was in primary school, I used to do theatre. I have always loved theatre. I was good at it. But my father opposed a little bit. When I graduated from high school, he asked me to give it up. But my love for theatre is not dead. It is always there. And one day I told myself ok, since it is no longer in front of the camera, it will be behind it. I tried to do an audiovisual course. I contacted Media Centre Dakar amongst others. I went there, I saw them, but the course fees were... quite exorbitant. So, I gave up.

When RDV television announced the contest, I submitted my application. Fortunately, I succeeded. And at that point, I told myself that I have found my way. I like law studies; when I was a little girl, my dream was to be a barrister. I wanted to be either a journalist or a barrister. But now, I realise that I have found my way. I would never like to have a job which confines you inside an office. However I like very much to do fieldwork. For my father, law is more important than audio-visual. But to be honest, if I happen to get a scholarship today to study abroad, I would use it to go and do film. To go thoroughly, yes... Yes, I have found my way. I would like to continue on the route of film shooting, producing. But I see that for film production you need to have many years of experience. So I decided to concentrate for the time being in film shooting. I need to gain deeper knowledge about television in Dakar, and later on, I may think about film production.

Behind (the camera) you can spy upon people. You try to exteriorize that person, to show externally what he or she is internally. That above all. It is very profound. After starting at ESMA, they told us: you must produce a film at the end of your training.

I saw a lady behind our school. A mulatto lady from Mali who has been living behind our school for 30 years. She is a bit of an artist. She called my attention. When I went to do my exercises she helped me a little. She likes colours, stuff like that. I proposed to my teacher if I could make the film on Mme Bonnaire. People also used to call her Mrs Bu Neex [she who is delicious], Mrs Buujmaan [she who recovers]. She is the darling of the neighbourhood.

At last, that project was left aside because we are young people and we are sensitive to the evils that shake the country: floods, electricity break-downs... With our administration we decided to do the films around a series called 'Heaven and State', so as to say the calamities brought by 'heaven' and the responsibility of the State on them. I have not really reflected on this yet, but the school authorities are telling us that it is a bit urgent to make films on flood, for the 'Heaven and State' series.

And then, we went to the suburbs to make 5 films with 5 different groups.

I was in group 2: "See Zam Zam and die". There is a kind of lake at Zam Zam and five children perished there. They were just playing. They went to pick up their ball. It was very deep, they didn't know. The grass was high and there was rubbish. It was deep. The children went to look for the ball. They perished there. The others were following birds, ducks. They kept on throwing stones and [without noticing] got to a place where they should not have gone.... So, all these made an impression on us. We visited that area and we made our graduation film.

## (16) Cinema can be as virulent as hip-hop

*Author* : Makhfouss Diop, étudiant de cinema

*Activity* : documentary making course subsidized by Africa Cinema de Quartier (APCA)

*Story collected by* : Oumar Ndao

*Date and place* : 16 October 2009 | Toubab Dialaw, Sénégal

I am not a hero who can write novels but simply a man, a young man with a passion for cinema, music and art in general. I have been writing now for some days. What could a young Senegalese man passionate about art write about, if he neither pretends nor has an overflowing imagination, or the talent of a special writer? He will certainly write about himself, his life and his passion. Taking into account the questions asked, I will do my best to tell you about my life, my story, especially the story of the significant changes that I have experienced through an activity organized by APCA.

My name is Makhfouss Diop. I was born and brought up at Médina, one of the most popular areas in Dakar. As all boys coming from that area, we played hide-and-peek, participated in football tournaments where the trophy was milk in nickel tins, [we watch] dog-fights, without forgetting diseases for lack of hygiene, because we spent most of our time at the draining channel which takes sewage and rain water from Fass to Gueule Tapée. But I was quickly rescued by my mother, a brave woman. I had five brothers and since my father was rarely at home it was my mother who took care on her own of our education and is still in charge until today. Médina is an area characterized by Islamic values so it was compulsory to attend the Coranic School before the French school. I attended Primary School at SACOURA BADIANE (Colobane) which bears the name of my grandfather. The secondary school [I did it] at LAMINE GUEYE high school. I was troubled and combative as any other Médina boy with an ideology developed by our elders for generations which was 'never be behind the others, no matter what'.

In my third year at secondary school, I was expelled from the Spanish course till the end of the year. These courses were essential for [achieving] coefficient four (4). But during all that time, I was in a musical environment at home, because my uncle had a small group of rappers, who, five years later, became internationally known. I used to stay with them late in the night listening to their rehearsals, bringing them water and taking their messages. The name of the group was DAARA J. After their period of success, they parted from my uncle. Then he had another group, this time all the members were typically from Médina. They left a landmark in a movement which Senegalese audience was delighted to discover: RAPADIO. My success at the BFEM surprised everybody. I was expelled from school for misconduct. I went to Dela Fosse high school and stayed there up to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Being a pure and hard rap enthusiast, it was during that period that I met other young boys who were as fond of rap music as I was. We used to call it rap 'made in Galsen'. I began to like this art and went into it from head to feet: I dressed and spoke like them, everything. When I graduated from high school, I promised myself to learn English so that in the future my texts could reach a greater amount of people, as I aspired to become a rapper. I also wanted to understand the lyrics of American rappers.

I do not really know how I managed to find myself at the Law Faculty, but after 6 months there I gave up. I met Alou when I was in 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Both of us came from Médina, we dressed the same way and we got along very quickly. I thought that I could rap very well but Alou proved me the contrary. Every day, he beat me in Freestyle, he already had had a crew for 7 years and me, I had just started. So, I began to question myself about my rap.

In addition to rap, I was mad about video clips and for everything audiovisual. I wanted to work at a television station but I did not know how to do it.

A friend of mine told me about Media Centre of Dakar. One day I went to that institution to get some information. But prices there were exorbitant: 800 000 CFA Francs. I could not even imagine myself asking that amount to my mother.

There was no week when I didn't go to Media Centre Dakar to ask the fees for the training courses even though I already knew them. I stayed at home almost one year and even more without doing anything related to education. Any time my mother came from work she asked me if I had gone to university. And of course, I answered "yes". But I was a responsible person and I could not continue lying to her, even more since she had always been there for us. I felt a bit guilty lying to her in this way. Suddenly one day I told her all the truth and she understood me very well. She promised to pay my audiovisual training the following year.

At that time APCA (Africa Cinéma de Quartier) became part and parcel of my life. And their activities have really brought a change; a true change in my life, this is the story:

I was at home watching television as I do every day, and I read during the advertising slot that a school for audiovisual formation was about to be opened (ESMA) and that an entrance contest would be organized. I immediately called the phone number which was given. They asked me to go to their office one day in the morning. I went there with a friend of mine. The fees were the same than at Media Centre. But there was a contest, which would enable the top fifteen selected to benefit of free charges through scholarship because that training session had been sponsored by APCA (Africa Cinéma de Quartier).

I paid the deposit and submitted my documents for the competition. I was greatly surprised to be one of the youngest candidates who passed the competition, and they had put me in third place.

The most significant change with the activities of Africa Cinéma de Quartier is not only a change, but a dream which became real.

I succeeded in preventing my family from expending 800 000 CFA Francs and in addition to that, I will be able to practice the profession of my dream, to be a filmmaker. And if I strive a bit, I will be able to make clips of my rapper friends, starting of course, with my own crew. It is tremendous and it is my whole life that has changed. It was for me the most significant change with an activity organized by APCA.

In what respects to the most significant change that I have known in general with an artistic or cultural event, it came from excursions and meetings we made with Africa Cinema de Quartier. During two months, almost every weekend, the school organizes visits to festivals (Art and Life, etc.) or meetings with great filmmakers. Culturally for me, the discovery of Senegalese and African cinema was something almost astonishing. I did not know that there were people in Africa who were so accomplished filmmakers like Ousmane Sembene and so many others. Discovering the history of African cinema, studying the image and the cinematographic discourse has really opened my eyes. Now, I understood many things on Mother Earth concerning vindication (of identity, justice, culture, etc...), on the way of conveying messages and above all, on how you can use culture to impose [your ideas].

And to answer the question "why this change has been so significant for me?" the answer is simple:

I have discovered other means of expression very close to rap and which can be as virulent as hip-hop texts. We are living the century of the image, and by mastering that tool, it can be an excellent weapon for any vindication (political, social and cultural).

## RAW MATERIAL COMPANY

### (17) An open door to the international art scene

*Author* : George Osodi

*Activity* : Artist residence in Norway, opportunity created by Koyo Kouoh, director of Raw Material company.

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes

*Date and place* : October/November 2009, by e-mail

Since I met Koyo Kouoh in 2006 during her research trip for Documenta 12, she has been very supportive to me in terms of guarding me with suggestions and criticism as regards my work. This has helped me to improve the way I approach projects and present my work. Before meeting her, I was working as a reporter for Associated Press and had never been presented within a contemporary art setting.

Being in Documenta 12 was the most significant change I have ever experienced. Documenta 12 exposed me to the international art scene and most importantly exposed my work to be seen by a much more larger audience. Since then I have had the opportunity to show my work in various museums, galleries and places in different parts of the world.

One of my most significant moments after Documenta 12 was when I was selected by Koyo Kouoh to be part of a project in Norway. I was given an artist residency and was supported financially in conjunction with the National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design to document through photography the effect of oil money in the life of the people of Norway, which is also an oil rich country.

This has always been my dream after I had documented through photography the oil-rich Niger delta in Nigeria, work exhibited in Documenta 12 in 2007. I wanted to continue the project on a larger spectrum traveling to different continents where oil is produced to look and document the impact and effects of oil in these regions, and to see how oil politics is played by the various players and how it differs in one continent from the other, now that oil has become the world's life-blood.

Koyo made it possible for me to do this in Norway in 2008, and the work produced was exhibited in an exhibition curated by her and Stina Hogkvist titled "Hypocrisy: the site specificity of morality?". The show is one of a series planned as part of Afrika i Oslo (AiO), a platform to show work by African artists, organized by curators from Norwegian institutions and in Africa to find fresh ways of interpreting African art. This show, which includes work by African and Norwegian artists, focuses on the gap between cultures in this era of global capitalism. This was very meaningful to me as it gave me the opportunity to have a cultural relationship with artists and people in general in Norway, hence I had the chance to travel to some regions during my stay documenting the country. It has helped me to understand a bit of how oil politics work in that part of Europe as I look forward to the next continent.

The perception I had of Norway before I began the project changed. Having documented the oil-rich Niger delta in Nigeria, I had assumed that the oil business in Norway was very organized and free of conflict. However, I was amazed to find out that a country like Norway was still divided on the issue of human rights, environmental protection and many more issues. During my stay in Norway, I met with various groups like the environmental groups who are trying to stop the national oil multinationals from drilling in a fishing Island called Lofoten, and I also spent some time with a group of Norwegian sea-divers in Stavanger, which is Norway's oil city. Several of the divers who played a key role in building up Norway's offshore oil industry are suing the state, charging that they weren't informed about the risks of diving as deeply as they did at the time in the North Sea.

The North Sea divers have sought compensation for years, after many were left with severe health and psychological problems after dives made in the 1960s and 1970s as they claim. I could not believe that the government oil industry was dragging this issue in court and didn't want to compensate these few oil pioneering divers the little they wanted or even taking care of by the government. I felt this was disrespectful of their human rights.

Also when I was in Lofoten, to my surprise the divide-and-rule method was very common in oil politics. Lofoten is a small and very beautiful Island in Norway and is said to have a lot of oil deposits. The National oil companies want to drill in the region, but they are being resisted by environmental groups who want to protect the Island fishing industry and the environment from oil pollution. On the other hand there are other groups who want the oil companies to drill in the region claiming that drilling will open up the economy, will bring jobs to the youths, health care and education development, and that the oil companies will take proper precautions to stop pollution. So I was very amazed to see this system of divide-and-rule among these various groups playing there.

## PORTES ET PASSAGES DU RETOUR

### **(18) The residency at Ngazobil opened doors for me**

*Author* : Seydou Diedhiou

*Activity* : Artist residence at the hangar studio/contemporary art-gallery in Ngazobil, from 2005 to 2007.

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes | Transcription and translation by Oliver Nelson

*Date and place* : 16 October 2009 | Toubab Dialaw, Senegal

My name is Seydou Diedhiou, I am a visual artist. After my studies at the Fine Arts school, I had the feeling that my works were never completed. I had a problem of space too. I didn't even finish my studies at the Fine

Arts school because of personal reasons: I had to work at my family's home, but the family environment was not good for my work.

It is with [the artist] Kan-Si that I found a way that sums up all that I wanted to say through painting, which is a fundamental means of expression for me, because I am among those who express themselves through what they do.

The whole thing began with the workshop he proposed to me on *sous verre* painting, which was followed by a two-year residence at the studio in Joal. It was under their supervision that I could convert my way of working from *sous verre* onto canvas.

When I came back to Dakar, I tried to work on a theme about the goat and writing. In my way of doing things, I try to be a bit engaged to what happens around me. For me, Africa only can develop through agriculture. We have to try to solve the food self-sufficiency problem.

So, it was on that basis that I started working on an element which would allow me to take a pre-text: the goat. I showed the work to Kan-Si and he was very impressed by it. But since I had some difficulties to continue the task, I stopped it for a while. It was afterwards that he called me and asked me if I would be interested in working at the hangar, the workplace of Portes et Passages association.

When I gave him my consent, he took me to Joal, to the Association. I stayed there for two years. Those two years were really extraordinary, for the place turned to be an ideal one. There was plenty of energy there and I had many working possibilities. So, each time they [artists Kan-si and Muhsana Ali] came, I was under their direction, they had things to say about what I was doing.

When he saw that I had continued developing my *sur verre* paintings in Joal, he said: "Can't you put them on canvas?" Just an example of how they intervened in my work.

I then followed their advice about painting on canvas. For two years, I could not see any impact because I had to come back, I was ill at that time. I left and I continued working up to the point that I had a proposal to take part in an exhibition; it was really moving for me because it was my first show. It was at the Eiffage Exhibition in January 2009.

It was my first group exhibition and it really surprised me. All the paintings on canvas that I exhibited were sold. They [Kan-Si and Muhsana Ali] didn't abandon me, I must say, even if there had been two years of rupture, they came to the exhibition.

This has played a very important role in general, but above all, I think the assistance I got from them for my work worked like ice, in the sense that you can add water to the ice to increase it, or you can melt it and drink it according to your thirst. The directives they gave me now enable me to 'dilute' myself into my work the way I like. This is to explain that I have plenty in my mind [and I learnt how to manage the flow of ideas/images]. That exhibition enabled me to participate in other ones, it opened doors for me. One of these doors was the exhibition organized by the British Council in which I was given the award.

The most significant change [that happened to me] has been the fact of having been able to express what is inside me, to capture it, to work on it any time I feel like painting and that I have the materials to do so.

At the relational level, it has changed the ideas that my family members used to have about me, for, in the past, they used to say: "You, artists, you are dreamers". Now, I have gained some more respect. I am going to tell you an anecdote: when I was attending the Fine Arts school, any time my father came from work and found me painting, he would say "There is a lunatic sitting over there!". After taking part in that exhibition, I was able to take care of my brothers and sisters' school fees. This is something I really enjoyed. There is nothing better for an artist than showing your work and being encouraged to earn money for solving the family problems, such as taking part in the education of your brothers and, above all, of your sisters.

## **(19) I have a profession**

*Author* : Gilbert Medeton

*Activity* : Participant of the art-project "Portes et Passages du Retour" in Abidjian, by artist Muhsana, co-founder of *Portes et Passages du Retour*, holistique art centre.

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes | Transcribed and translated by Oliver Nelson

*Date and place* : 16 October 2009 | Toubab Dialaw

When I was in Ivory Coast, I used to live in the streets; my job was to drive cars at parking lots. I managed in my own way. Early in my life, there had been a small problem in my family and that pushed to the streets. I cannot tell you everything in detail. But anyway, I left home and tried to take care of myself at the age of 17. Because of this I met a lady called Muhsana Ali, I worked with her. I stuck to her. Thanks to her, I have known a lot of things, I got to know Senegal, lots of things in my life and many aspects of my life have changed.

Thanks to Muhsana, I discovered painting. I worked with her, we did some work at the central hospital [in Abidjan]. We have been exhibiting there since 1996. After that work, she traveled and left me alone in Ivory Coast. I started developing my own style of painting with some friends of mine. I did not have enough means. All that time, Muhsana and I were always in contact. After 7 or 8 years, she called me and told me she needed me here in Sénégal.

She is an American woman. Thanks to her I discovered Senegal and the artists too. Discovering Senegal was the dream of my life. I found the traditional stuff and magnificent things in my life, too. Thanks to her, there has been a change in my life. On the top of that, she keeps teaching me painting skills. My life has changed a lot because before meeting her, my life was a little difficult. I did not know what to learn in life. Thanks to her, I stuck to her and now I have a profession in life. I stuck to this [profession], and that changed things in my life. Not only money, but also improvements in other aspects of my life as well. The change that I experienced thanks to her, what I learnt, is painting. This is what I want to say. Now, I have a profession.

**Note of the editor:** *Muhsana Ali is a painter, printmaker and installation artist from Senegal, who addresses social issues in an attempt to find positive solutions. Focussing on the transatlantic slave route, her installation Doors and Passageways of Return highlighted issues relating to history, alienation and dislocation. The installation was produced in collaboration with street children in Abidjan, Ivory Coast and was initially presented in the abandoned building they lived in, an old hospital. She has subsequently co-founded with her partner Kan-Si, also an artist, Portes et passages du Retour, a non-profit organization developing an holistic art centre in Senegal.*

## (20) The potter women of Nguéniène

*Author :* Interview to Aissatou Wade and Codou Thiam

*Activity :* Ceramics workshop with the potter women from Nguéniène at Portes et Passages du Retour's hangar in Ngazobil.

*Interview made by :* Oumar Ndao | Translated from Wolof into French by Fatime Faye. Translation from French into English by Oliver Nelson.

*Date and place :* 16 October 2009 | Toubab Dialaw, Senegal

*Sow (Oumar Ndao) :* - Good morning, ladies !

*Aissatou Wade :* - Good morning !

*Sow :* - Where are you from? From Joal?

*Aissatou Wade :* - From Ngéniène.

*Sow :* - Are you from Ngéniène?

*Aissatou Wade :* - Yes.

*Sow :* - Then, are you my Sérère relatives?

*Aissatou Wade :* - Right

*Sow :* - Is the man who came with you here a Toucouleur? I saw him entering here and going out so quickly.

*Codou Thiam :* - Ah ! (Laughter)

*Sow :* - Who brought you here?

*Aissatou Wade :* - Yes.

*Sow :* - Is it him who brought you here?

*Codou Thiam :* - It is Kan-Si who accompanied us.

*Sow :* - Nobody accompanied you here?

*Codou Thiam :* - No. Besides God, nobody else.

*Sow :* - Hum ?

*Codou Thiam* : - Kan-Si?

*Sow* : - Didn't he come with you?

*Codou Thiam* : - Yes, of course. He is the one who brought us here, but...

*Sow* : - He is a Toucouleur and you accepted to be taken by him? (*NoT* : like cattle or children. A joke in the frame of cousinship teasing between *Sérères* and *Toucouleurs*). (LAUGHTER)

*Sow* : - Which one of you will speak first ? What is your name?

*Codou Thiam* : - You answer! (*to Aissatou in Sérère*) He wants to know who will speak first.

*Sow* : - we can start with... Both together? Maybe the one holding the microphone wants to speak first ?

Which one of you is the oldest?

*Codou Thiam* : - She is the oldest. Let her speak first, Astou Wade.

*Sow* : - What is your family name?

*Aissatou Wade* : - Wade.

*Sow* : - My family name is Sow

*Aissatou Wade* : - Sow. (*greeting him by using his family name*)

*Sow* : - How are you ?

*Aissatou Wade* : - I am fine.

*Sow* : - How are people at Nguéniène?

*Aissatou Wade* : - They are fine.

*Sow* : - Courage!

*Aissatou Wade* : - Courage to you, too!

*Sow* : - I have been told that you are on a project.

*Aissatou Wade* : - Our project?

*Sow* : - How do you call it?

*Codou Thiam* : - Portes et passages.

*Sow* : - Hum ? Portes et passages?

*Aissatou Wade* : - Speak! (*NoT*: to *Codou* in *Sérère*).

*A participant* : - We can't hear you. Can you speak louder?

*Codou Thiam* : - Can't you hear? (LAUGHTER, discussions among the women, the participant and the moderator. Exchange between the two ladies in *Sérère*).

*Aissatou Wade* : - You are far away from us. I am talking especially about you who are over there. You are too far away from us. We cannot hear what you are saying.

*Sow* : - It is you who are speaking in a low voice. (LAUGHTER) Didn't you have any breakfast?

*Aissatou Wade* : - We have eaten very well!

*Sow* : - When did you start your project, Mrs. Wade?

*Aissatou Wade* : - We started it last year.

*Sow* : - Did you have other activities when you started this project?

*Aissatou Wade* : - Yes, We had other activities. We used to make ceramics that we sold at the market. Kan-Si met us selling our articles. He saw that we were tired. He thought that he could help us seeing that we were brave. We don't have any other income except for the money we get from the selling of our articles there. (*NoT*: They brought and exhibited some of her ceramics for the participants of the evaluation). Earthen pots and perforated pots that we sell at the market. Sometimes it happens that we can only sell two or three articles a day. When you need to bring something back home... He [*Kan-Si*] had mercy upon us...to see us at the market. He approached us. This happened 3 years ago...Last year, he invited us here [*Portes et Passages' hangar in Ngazobil*] for a week. Yes.

*Sow* : - Where did you learn to make the articles that he found you making? From whom did you inherit the technique?

*Aissatou Wade* : - We inherited it from our forbears. Our forbears did the same thing. We learnt the technique when we were children and we have perpetrated it.

*Sow* : - Did you learn it when you were children or teenagers?

*Aissatou Wade* : - When we were very young children. As soon as we could crush kaolin because you need to pound the raw material.

*Sow* : - Do you use kaolin?

*Aissatou Wade* : - Yes, we pound it. We go to the bush to look for clay. We mix up the whole thing. We take out the sand, we triturate the clay to make objects like those over there [the ones on display for the participants to see]. If we take clay mixed up with sand and triturate it that will not work. It must be diluted in order to take all the sand out of it to keep only the clay. You need to let the mixture decant and throw the water away in order to use only the clay. Then you mix it up with the kaolin, you give it a form, you let it dry up and then you bake it. But this is a task that we cannot perform in the rainy season, because the ground is soaked in water and we cannot bake the potteries. The ground is flooded and we do not have any other source of income. [*NoT*: the baking process takes place on the ground]

Sow : - So, you don't work in the rainy season?

Aissatou Wade : - No. We cannot do this work in the rainy season. But if we had other means of baking clay, we could continue working.

Sow : - A dry place? A place sheltered from rain?

Aissatou Wade : - Yes, a place like that.

Sow : - I hope that it is not that kaolin that is sold in Dakar streets and that people eat.

Aissatou Wade : - No. Not that kaolin. Ours, we go to look for it as far as to... But those who like it, they can eat ours as well. Those who eat the other kaolin may eat ours if they like, because ours is white.

Sow : - Is it better?

Aissatou Wade : - This one, we go to look for it into the *simongs* [NoT: word in Sérere]

Sow : - Between this one and the one eaten in Dakar, which one has the best taste ?

Aissatou Wade : - Ah ! I don't eat it. (LAUGHTER) I use it for my work, but I don't eat it.

Sow : - Coming back to Portes et Passages du Retour.

Aissatou Wade : - OK?

Sow : - Is Kan-Si its initiator?

Codou Thiam : - Yes. Amadou Kan-Si.

Aissatou Wade : - Yes. Amadou Kan-Si.

Sow : - Is he the only one who accompanies you? There are other people, aren't there?

Aissatou Wade : - Yes.

Codou Thiam : - But he is the only one we see.

Sow : - Is it him the one who you see most often?

Aissatou Wade : - He is the one we know, that we see... With his wife, Ma Sane [Muhsana Ali]. We know them well because they come to our place and we meet often.

Sow : - Did you pay them a visit at their place?

Aissatou Wade : - No. We have not gone to Dakar. We have stayed at the space where we work when he invites us, he comes to see us at the market. Yes, it is there that we see him and we have never gone to Dakar.

Sow : - So, one day he came and introduced himself to you with his ugliness ?

Aissatou Wade : - Yes, with our ugliness... Besides, we were not ugly because we had washed.

Sow : - No, not you. I am talking about him.

Aissatou Wade : - He is not ugly at all !

Sow : - He is ugly ! (LAUGHTER)

Aissatou Wade : - He is a Toucouleur but he does not look like the other Toucouleurs. (LAUGHTER).

Aissatou Wade : - He does not look like those Toucouleurs over there. [pointing at participants coming from Fouta, in the North of Senegal].

Sow : - So he came one day and told you : "Salamalekoum"? Or did he observe you beforehand?

Aissatou Wade : - He came by, he saw us selling our potteries under the sun, he saw us working. Right.

Sow : - Then ? What did he tell you?

Aissatou Wade : - He told us that we deserved to get enough income from our work which is very hard and does not generate enough income. Right.

Sow : - What else did they say? I am sorry to ask all these questions, but this is necessary for this task [the evaluation process].

Aissatou Wade : - This is part of it. [we understand].

Sow : - What is the best that your collaboration has brought to your work ?

Aissatou Wade : - We thank God. We are very glad. We have collaborated for only one year. In the past, we did not know this village. If we are here today, it is thanks to him and God. The day before yesterday, we heard talking about it for the first time. I wondered where this place could be...Really.

Sow : - Toubab Dialaw ?

Aissatou Wade : - Yes. Just a few minutes ago, somebody asked me from what village we are. (Note : a call on her mobile). So, it is thanks to him and to God that we have discovered this village. Really, we pray for him.

Aissatou Wade : - I will rest now. Codou Thiam.

Codou Thiam : - Yes. My family name is Thiam

Sow : - Are you relatives ?

Codou Thiam : - Yes, we are relatives.

Sow : - How are you related ?

Codou Thiam : - She is the daughter of my father's sister.

Sow : - Is it the same family then ?

Codou Thiam : - Yes. The same family.

*Sow* : - Traditionally, who does this work in your village? Have you taken back your forbears work? Apart from your family, are there other families who do this work there?

*Codou Thiam* : - No. We are the only family....It is our line of descendants who perform this type of work.

*Sow* : - If somebody else outside your family wants to learn the job...

*Codou Thiam* : - Who wants to learn it?

*Sow* : - Would you teach him/her the job?

*Codou Thiam* : - Ah ! Yes. if someone wants to learn it, we will teach her/him... It is just a job. We don't intend to keep the exclusivity, because it is a useful job, which can generate incomes. We only invest our working force. So, we are ready to teach it to anyone who wants to learn it.

*Sow* : - In this case, I start tomorrow because it seems that it generates money...

*Codou Thiam* : - But it is hard.

*Aissatou Wade* : - It is really hard.

*Sow* : - What is hard in it? Collecting the sand and creating forms? Or are there other things included?

(LAUGHTER)

*Aissatou Wade* : -It is not the sand, it is the clay.

*Codou Thiam* : - It is tiresome.

*Sow* : - What do you do once you get the clay?

*Codou Thiam* : - Once you get the clay, you wet it and soften it. While triturating it, you put plenty of water in it. The clay forms a deposit on the sand....

*Sow* : - It is not difficult to do that!

*Codou Thiam* : - Then you take the water and clay. You throw the sand away. One hour later, after decantation, water overflows on the mud. You throw away the water, and then you add very refined pounded kaolin to the clay. You beat and triturate the mixture till it consolidates.

*Sow* : - Do you do that manually?

*Codou Thiam* : - Yes, by hand, on a plastic sheet till it consolidates. Then we take a quantity of clay to create forms. We use our imagination, our spirit to create. All of our inspiration, because we make earthen pots, traditionally....

*Sow* : - Earthen pots ?

*Codou Thiam* : - Yes, pots and perforated pots, censers for bathing.

*Aissatou Wade* : - Njàkh.

*Codou Thiam* : - Njàkh, right. Kan-Si saw that we could remain a whole day without selling a single article, he saw that we were tired because we counted with the income from selling these articles to settle all our expenses and those of our families. So he told us that we deserved to get support and that we could collaborate with him. He said: 'If God wants it, Inchallah, we can collaborate to promote the craft". For a long time he had been saying that, but only last year we really started collaborating. Yes, only last year.

*Sow* : - In short, it is a hard work which does not generate enough income. Thanks to the project [collaboration with *Portes et Passages du Retour*] things have become easier and now you sell your potteries better. Is this correct?

*Codou Thiam* : - Ah! We have not started the commercialisation yet.

*Sow* : - Haven't you started the commercialisation of your articles yet ?

*Codou Thiam* : - No, we haven't sold anything yet. It was from this collection that we took the samples exhibited over there. But that was our agreement. We collaborate first; then we see the results. We are waiting for results, of course.

*Sow* : - May God go with you.

*Codou Thiam* : - Amen.

*Sow* : - Has your work become easier now or are you still working with the same methods?

*Codou Thiam* : - We are using the same methods.

*Sow* : - Triturating clay, pounding and all the rest?

*Codou Thiam* : - Yes. All that. But if we had the means to continue firing our potteries during the rainy season, if we had kilns and other materials, this would be better. Indeed. We need help to be able to work during the rainy season as we work in the dry season... Because it is our only job. Yes. If you can help us in this sense...

*Sow* : - Mrs. Wade, did you discuss it in the frame of the project, to have some promotion at that level?

*Aissatou Wade* : - Ah yes ! This is what we wish, what we are asking to God.

*Sow* : - What does Kan-Si think about it? About the acquisition of a kiln and materials? (LAUGHTER)

*Aissatou Wade* : - He said that he will help us to get that kiln. Right. Those articles you see over there were burnt through his good offices.

*Sow* : - Has he fired them himself?

*Codou Thiam* : - He had them fired in a kiln for us.

*Sow* : - Is it under that big hangar where he works near Joal? Kan-Si had a big hangar there.

*Codou Thiam* : - Yes, a white hangar.

*Aissatou Wade* : - Yes. It is behind that. He has set a small kiln there.

*Codou Thiam* : - Yes. It is there that he works.

*Sow* : - How many of you went there ?

*Codou Thiam* : - Ah ! We were really a lot.

*Sow* : - Were you many? Has the number diminished? Were some discouraged?

*Codou Thiam* : - No. We worked all together but because of the rainy season we stopped working. Yes. And we have not resumed it yet. Yes.

*Codou Thiam* : - Yes. One of my daughters makes censers. She knows how to make plenty of other things. I learnt my job in the same way.

*Sow* : - How old is she? Is she tall?

*Codou Thiam* : - She? She is ten years old.

*Sow* : - And she knows how to make censers?

*Codou Thiam* : - Yes.

*Sow* : - Mrs. Wade, do you transmit the technique, too? (*laughter*)

*Aissatou Wade* : - Yes. I teach the job, too.

*Sow* : - Hum, hum.

*Aissatou Wade* : - And I am ready to teach it to any free man.

*Sow* : - Any free man?

*Aissatou Wade* : - Yes. To any free man. Even to you, if you want. (*LAUGHTER*)

*Aissatou Wade* : - Men like women can do this job. If you come, I will teach it to you.

*Sow* : - Ah yes?

*Aissatou Wade* : - Yes.

*Sow* : - There are no secrets?

*Aissatou Wade* : - No. There is nothing secret.

*Sow* : - But do you need to say prayers, incantations, to bear talismans, do you take some ritual baths... to practice this job?

*Aissatou Wade* : - It is a hard job.

*Codou Thiam* : - Our forbears did that. Before Islam and...others. But we, we only recite a Fatiha or God's words. We rely on that. And it works.

*Sow* : - Inchallah.

*Codou Thiam* : - Inchallah. We don't practice any other ritual.

*Aissatou Wade* : - It is hard. We have to go to the bush to collect cow dung with bags and pans, one by one until we fill them up. We carry all these loads on our heads and do many trips. Then we go to the vans to look for straw. This is our fuel to fire the potteries like those over there [*she points out the ceramics that were on display*]. It is very difficult. We are often in the bush.

*Sow* : - Hum, hum.

*Aissatou Wade* : - That's the way we do it. We put them into tanks and others containers, we fire them and then we get the result that you see over there.

*Sow* : - Hum, hum.

*Aissatou Wade* : - Yes. It is very tiresome. We are all the time in the bush looking for what we need.

*Codou Thiam* : - We look for... Do you know cow dung?

*Sow* : - Yes.

*Codou Thiam* : - It is cow dung, a lot of cow dung that we pile up. We put on top the ceramic pieces to be fired. We cover the pieces with broken ceramic resulting from former breakages. Then we spread out a lot of straw all over it. When we set fire to the straw, this gives strong heat ; then the fire reaches the lower part and everything burns.

*Aissatou Wade* : - With the heat.... After everything finishes burning...

*Codou Thiam* : - Before all the fuel gets burnt up, everything is red and that heat fires the ceramic pieces as you can see over there. That's our process.

*Sow* : - Hum.

*Codou Thiam* : - But before getting that result, we get really tired.

*Aissatou Wade* : - In the rainy season, apart from firewood that we must buy....

*Codou Thiam* : - In the rainy season, we cannot use these types of fuel. We must buy firewood.

*A participant* : - How long does it take? How many articles do you make a day?

*Codou Thiam* : - How many articles per day? This depends on your working capacity.

*Sow* : - An idea ?

*A participant* : - One, two, three, or what?

*Codou Thiam* : - We can make nearly 5 a day if we want to make them beautiful. You know, we cannot rush the work. Our work must be done with care.

*Aissatou Wade* : - This process is slow.

*Codou Thiam* : -Yes, it is slow. But you can make 5 a day.

*Aissatou Wade* : - It is very slow. We start in the morning...

*Codou Thiam* : - From morning till evening.

*Sow* : - From all the things we have heard, what should be remembered as the most important? We have talked about a lot of things, we cannot remember them all...

*Codou Thiam* : - The most important thing to remember ? It is that you help us to get that kiln...

*Sow* : - The kiln?

*Aissatou Wade* :-The kiln and also to promote our art.

*Codou Thiam*:- We just need help. I beg you. That is the reason why we have come. If we had not come, we would not have met. If we had not spoken, you wouldn't know about us. But take it easy. It was our goal for coming here. Thank you very much.

## **(21) An opportunity to discover the ceramics practice the way our African ancestors used to make it**

*Author* : Théodore Félix Ngom

*Activity* : Ceramics workshop at *Portes et Passages du Retour*

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes

*Date and place* : 16 October 2009 | Toubab Dialaw, Sénégal

My name is Théodore Félix Ngom. I am a visual artist, a painter. I was born and grew up in Dakar. I am a self-trained artist, I have never attended a school of arts. I have been based in Joal Fadiouth for three years now. After arriving, I started with *Portes et passages*.

The [artistic] event that has made a deeper mark in me until today is the artistic residency organized by *Portes et Passages du Retour* with the potter women from Nguéniène. I faced several obstacles when I started the project with them, starting with the fact that I was on my own, my parents are from Fadiouth, from the island. When we started the project I was more or less like a mediator between *Portes et Passages* and the ladies. The most interesting thing during this project was the discovery because when I arrived, I had the idea of painting. I never thought I was going to make ceramics at Joal Fadiouth.

At the beginning of the project, Kan-Si used to visit Nguéniène from time to time to attend a football match every Wednesday and it was then that he met the ladies.

When he came back he told me that he wanted us to organise a workshop with these women, he wanted to invite them for an exchange related to their work. So we had the ceramic workshop with them.

Those artistic exchanges enabled me to discover many things regarding the working techniques of the material. Being a self-trained artist, it was an opportunity to discover the practice of ceramics in the way our African ancestors used to do it. This way of treating and working the clay that the potter women from Nguéniène have inherited from their parents gave me a solid base, that now I will be able to use in my research and in my future creations.

As far as I am concerned I have discovered a lot more about working techniques there than in the city, doing ceramics in Dakar. In Dakar the technique is mostly academic; you need to follow the rules. Concerning the baking, the kilns are mostly electric kilns. It was very expensive. Only a few people had that kind of kiln in Dakar, therefore I never thought it was possible to bake ceramics in Joal Fadiouth.

I discovered this technique they already explained to you. In Dakar you use different types of minerals in order to make a stable material. But here the ladies have only one type of mineral, they use the kaolin. They mix the kaolin with the clay and batter them together: that is quite a technique. In Dakar there were many breakages during the baking because of the use of different minerals.

Also, in Dakar in order to get a good appearance in ceramics everyone uses glazing pigments. After a first bake, you apply a layer of glaze and then you put the piece back into the kiln.

The pigments used to colour the ceramics are imported. I did not use them but I know that most people have to import them. When glazing you have to bake the ceramics twice whereas here the people fire them only once. Once you finished the piece and before putting it in the kiln, you can apply the colours directly. The difference is that it will not shine. You use red lateritic soil on the piece if you want it coloured, or kaolin if you want to have it white. All this takes only one bake.

Of course, these are materials that can be found in the surrounding area in nature. In Dakar, most of the products put on the vases are chemical so you need to wear a mask, whereas those these ladies use they come from the soil, they are the red lateritic soil, and the kaolin.

The important thing about this technique is that is easy. As I said, I never imagined doing ceramics when I arrived to *la Petite Côte*. It was when I started the workshop that I met these women working with the soil, and the soil was right there, it was available. It's a dark soil, and the problem with it is that it breaks easily. However they found a solution to that by using a product that is natural [kaolin] and makes the vases stronger.

The most significant change that *Portes et Passages du Retour* brought to my artistic work has been the diversification of my activities. I have been painting for ten years so it was a pleasure for me to get into ceramics. It would have been almost impossible for me to do this without their contribution, both financial and human, because there are no artists in my village at the level of those I worked with in Joal.

## FESTIVAL DE L'EAU

### (22) We use the water, but how do we use it?

*Author* : Leyti Ndiaye

*Activity* : attendance of the Festival de l'Eau in Fouta since 1997, participant of the Forum about the meaning of water, holistique management of the water system.

*Story collected by* : Oumar Ndao

*Date and place* : 16 October 2009 / Toubab Dialaw, Sénégal

In Fouta [Northern region of Senegal], society is organised in castes: the craftsmen (blacksmiths, woodcutters, weavers and shoemakers), the fishermen, the Torodo (noblemen), the Peulhs (nomadic herdsman). These castes relate to a social division of the work.

The *marabouts* direct the prayings, teach the koran and the religious practice,

The *Maabo*, are the potters and the weavers;

The *Laobe* (woodcutters) work the wood to make the canoes, the kitchen utensils and several objects;

The *Baylo* (blacksmiths and jewellers), work the metals. They make the weapons and other hunting tools to fight the crocodiles (rifles, 'coupe-coupe', spears)

The *Cubalo*, they are the fishermen, masters of the river from where they get the science and the mysticism. They have they mystic knowledge. They have their common sense... They are gifted. They can damage their enemies with their powers. They fight crocodiles, hippopotamus... and the water mermaids. That means that they can talk with the water mermaids. They do many things. If you say Cubalo, you say water, in all Fouta they equal water. They possess everything that is in the water.

These activities are today seen with nostalgia and in a playful way during the religious ceremonies in the villages. They are about to disappear, and the Festival de l'eau in Fouta wants to preserve them: DAY-DAYRE (crocodile hunt), FIFIRE (canoe parade), PEKAN, ...

The FIFIRI is an event where a whole region meets by the river, to a part of the river where they say there are crocodiles. All the Cubalo from the region gather in groups. The night before they gather at the village square. The singers of PEKAN come and sing. [PEKAN is the fishermen traditional singing]. During the afternoon, in preparation for the crocodile hunt, each fisherman, through different incantations, boasts to be the best. They say "tomorrow, if God allows it, I will do this and this and this". "Tomorrow it will be me getting the crocodile first". Group after group they do this. They show their mystical knowledge, which allows them to locate the animal and kill it first than the others. Each one says to be the best, the one who knows better and

the more skilful. The crocodile hunt is a competition indeed. It is the battle of knowledge. The first person in taking a crocodile out of the water and killing it triumphs and is flattered by the others.

I have recorded many parts of these events, but unfortunately I am not a filmmaker. I attend this event since 1997. The Festival de l'eau has gathered us by the water. We use the water, but how do we use it?

## **(23) Bringing our cultural heritage back to life**

*Author : Mr Komé*

*Activity : organisation of the Festival de l'Eau in Walalde, Podor, 2008.*

*Story collected by : Oumar Ndao*

*Date and place : 16 October 2009 / Toubab Dialaw, Sénégal*

I come from Walalde, in the province of Podor (Northern Senegal). I represent a theatre group called "Goomu Pinal", which means theatre group in Pulaar. Pinal means culture in Pulaar. Our theatre is engaged [in social issues] and our theatre pieces get inspired in the problems lived by our people, for instance: political problems, and problems of castes.

Yes, our Pulaar society is subdivided in castes and some of them consider themselves superior. This brings many difficulties. Inter-castes marriage is impossible if the two castes do not share the same level at the social pyramid. However, things begun to evolve positively thanks to our work.

I am thioubalo, that is, fisherman. We have the PEKAANE, a way of singing which is specific to us. These songs are linked to the water and the river. During the PEKAANE evenings, the fishermen pronounce their letanies. They pronounce incantations to protect the bad spirits of the river, against the crocodiles and to improve the catch of fishes.

There are many dangerous things in the water, like crocodiles and other creatures. I had the chance to take part in the crocodile hunt.

Guelaye Aly Fall is a big singer of Pekaane. I don't know how to sing. Guelaye died before I was born or when I was very young, however he has left behind audio tapes that are regularly broadcasted on radio.

Currently our group does less and less theatre we have become an orchestra.

We work a lot and do not ask anything to anyone. We want to live from our art. With the support of NGAARI LAAW, we have co-organised Festival de l'eau in our town, in Walalde on 28 and 29 December 2008. That's why I'm here.

The festival has started after a popular appeal by NGAARI LAAW and their guests. During the afternoon we have organised the parades of canoes. People sang and played the tam-tams on the canoes. That's what we call the FIFIIRE. There was also an exhibition of traditional costumes.

The festival allowed us to immerse ourselves in our cultural past and to bring back to life our cultural heritage, which is about to disappear.

## Stories from Uganda and Tanzania

### AMAKULA KAMPALA

#### (1) For the very first time the word ‘filmmaker’ applied to me

*Author:* Paul Mugisha

*Activity:* Amakula Kampala's formation workshops

*Story collected by:* Claudia Fontes

*Date and Place:* 21 October 2009 | Kampala, Uganda

I'm a filmmaker at the moment. I actually studied telecommunication engineering and for some reason I don't understand I failed to get jobs in that particular field. Then in 2003 I resorted to doing films, I had had that love for film for quite a long time.

When I jumped into film I actually knew nothing, I had to teach myself, I had to go on the internet and research. No one would want to take me up because I knew nothing. With a friend of mine, we happened to get a camera and we tried to do something really so big, which was really impossible.

Luckily enough, Amakula came around in 2004. Amakula, to me, was like an eye-opener, it was something I had never seen. I had never travelled, never heard of film festivals, and I actually didn't know what these directors really looked like. I mean... were they [the same] kind of people than us?

Amakula gave us the opportunity to meet directors, to watch the movies, to get to learn about the different genres of films. And I learned quite a lot. If you had seen me in 2003, you would have laughed at me because I was asking all sorts of questions and trying to find my way in film. I thought that this was something that was really not here in town, and that if I continued with it, I would get somewhere with it. Luckily enough, Amakula came up with a lot of workshops, screenings and talks. I got to learn a lot. I can assure you, actually, most of my formation, [what] I know about film, really began there. [I am especially grateful to] the mentors, who come from Mohammed Amin Foundation; these guys are very good. They come to Amakula and they teach a lot. I got to learn a lot about 'Hollywood' tricks from them, the editing, camerawork, sound, why this is good and why it came about. They have quite a lot of information, they are very good resource to Amakula, I believe.

On the other hand I really credit Amakula for giving me an opportunity to shoot my first film, actually my second film. I did not have access to a camera and I really wanted to shoot something and have it under my name. It was 2007 and all the people I approached asked me for money and I could not afford it, it was very expensive. I realized that if I had to shoot my videos it would take me several years. But then Amakula came into the picture, with the 'One minutes organization and that helped me realise my dream in a very short time.

They taught us how to make one-minute films, and I didn't know that's where film-making starts: if you learn how to make a one minute film, then you can make a 5 minute, a 10 minute, a 30 minute film. Because each minute of the film counts and matters, and it's a very big principle that you wouldn't get around, no-one would really tell you why this film is good and why the other film is not good. I think if everyone came to learn that one principle that each minute of the film counts, I mean... that's huge. It was a very big lesson I got to learn for free and I really mastered it.

My film did so well that was showed in the Amakula Film Festival, and the Picture Film Festival in The Netherlands. It also went to Beijing, China, for the One Minute Olympics in 2008 and was a second runner-up in a short-film competition organized by the European Uganda Film Festival.

When I shot that film, I felt it was the very first time the word 'filmmaker' applied to me. I remember I was down in the auditorium and after each screening people were asking me a lot of questions, they were so inquisitive. I got to learn a little more about myself, I learnt that I tend to take things in a hard way and a tricky way, because many people didn't understand my film but they loved it.

Amakula does all these things for people like us, people who have not gone to film schools. I think most of filmmakers have come to learn what they know through Amakula and other organizations that deal with film, there is no film-school in Uganda. But even if what they do for us it has been really good, there is a negative aspect to it. They come, they give us all these lectures and we learn a lot, we get these skills, we become so good at what we are doing. The problem comes [when you need] to execute these skills. The film industry here is really not fully-grown, there are no funds.

Amakula have done a lot, they've brought all these bodies together to bring in all this knowledge, but at the end of the day, after getting the knowledge we are left... it's like a baby without a mother. There are no funds for us to shoot our own films and to keep us going. Many of us are really poor and we can't afford such equipment. So my worry is, I wish they would find a way for helping those young filmmakers who have gained something or have done something, if they would create a fund, basically, to get them somewhere.

There are of course international channels, but [in order to access them], you need to have something [a film to offer], and not just anything but it truly should be of a [film of] good standard. If you go asking for funds, and they ask you to make a pilot project and you don't have the money [to make it], you're just going to be stuck there and you'll do nothing. So I think, the donors, yes, they are doing a very good job that we appreciate, but if they would go a little bit further and create that bracket where they could get some few funds, it doesn't need to be a lot of money. If you fund those up-and-coming filmmakers, just to get them a little footing to some point, then who knows, later on they could become big.

I believe the mission of Amakula and the donors funding them is to uplift the film industry in the country. But I can assure you it's not really being uplifted. I would give you a challenge- you would go and see the next Amakula, how many new Ugandan films are made and how many feature films are really showing there? There are not so many.

## **(2) In search of African films**

*Author* : Rose Nakalanzi

*Activity*: user of film library at Amakula Kampala.

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes

*Date and Place* : 21 October 2009 | Kampala, Uganda

I am an assistant lecturer in the department of language education, school of education, and I'm lecturing in literature, English language studies and communication skills [at Makerere University].

I've been part of Amakula since their inception. I'm not really a staff member, but once in a while I engage in their activities. I came to be part of their activities because of my research project on African film. Before they came into the picture, I was looking left, right and centre for African films to use for my research project. The film industry in Uganda is relatively virgin, it is coming up now, but for a long time it's really been almost non-existent. So I was looking around for which films I could use for Uganda, and there was hardly any good feature film which could fall into that category I wanted to research on. So actually I made a trip to Nairobi because Kenya was a little bit more sophisticated in that area. I came across a director called Albert Wandago, who is the director of Alwan Films in Kenya. Somehow he managed to get me a few copies of some African films, mostly of Kenyan films. But I needed to get a wider scope, really, so basically I needed to look around more and more.

It was really difficult for the project to take off, but fortunately around the same time Amakula popped around. They started the film festival, I think, in 2004, if I remember that was their first launch of the Amakula Kampala film festival. I attended, and even took part in a workshop on single-shot cinema and had a go at directing, actually, as well as acting and shooting at the same time, using that mode. That was really fascinating.

After that I kept in touch with Alwan Films and, because of my interest in film, I became their country representative in Uganda. We launched one of their feature films called 'Naliaka is going', and I was in charge of organizing everything. We had it at the National Theatre for about a week.

I kept in touch with Amakula because I would connect Alwan films with Amakula's activities, because they had the festivals and Alwan would always submit short films, feature films and so on to be shown during the festival.

The most significant change I experienced was that it was so difficult for me to come across the films I wanted, but the continuous showcasing of various films from the rest of the world and most of Africa especially at Amakula's Festival opened my eyes to see how much was actually out there, which wasn't the case before. Here we hardly had any libraries with African films and so on, except for the Alliance Française, because that is the other source of films, where I used to come and see what they had. However most of the time they had films from Western Africa, which were biased towards French culture, being the Alliance Française a French cultural centre.

Thanks to Amakula I got to see more and more, and that widened my scope, up to the point that last year I was finally able to select which films I could actually use for the analysis, because I wanted to specifically investigate imaging of Africa, [how] African culture [is depicted] in contemporary film, by specifically looking at both the African directed and the non-African directed films, to see whether there was a difference. Of course that comparison was really hard, it was hard to get films with the same line of thought, so that you could then analyse them in terms of how they were directed and the various film aspects. But thanks to Amakula I must say that the opportunity was bigger, and through their library I was able to get the films, borrow them, sign them out and return them, take them home, analyse them, then bring them back.

That was really fascinating, and maybe in another way, [created a change] not just [for] me but I think [for] Makerere University as well as an institution. I must say I was the first person to research African film, or even film, in the literature department [at Makerere University], and my department was very excited about it. They have now introduced the subject as a fully-fledged course unit, and more people have continued to research in film. Since then they have actively been involved in filmmaking, film directing, and in Amakula's workshops.

Now when Amakula organizes workshops I usually attend, and sometimes we have a few disseminations, we talk about our own feelings, what we've discovered through our research, also in seminars. I'm writing my dissertation now so I'm hoping it will be available for people to refer to. Hopefully soon it can be out and then it can be a reference point for people who are in that field.

### **(3) On the road**

*Author* : Zipporah Nyaruri

*Activity*: Director's and camera aesthetics workshops at Amakula Kampala Festival 2008

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes

*Date and Place* : October/November 2009, by e-mail

I have attended the Amakula Film festivals and the workshops organized along them. What I appreciate more about the festival, is that it provides a platform for our films to be screened. In Uganda, few people produce quality films and Amakula gives them all a chance to screen these films. I think time is due for us Ugandans to appreciate this and accept both positive and negative critique received from this forum.

The collaboration between Amakula and the video halls in Kampala where they screen films are also very meaningful to me as a filmmaker. Distribution in East Africa is almost inexistent, with Kenya trying to make an attempt. The video halls are mostly attended by very low-income earners, who cannot afford to buy an expensive ticket in theatres. So it is good that films are able to reach these people in their neighbourhoods. From this, the number of people attending Amakula Film Festival keeps increasing every other year therefore contributing to the culture of film-watching.

However, the most significant change I have experienced through Amakula was at a director's and Camera aesthetics workshop organised in May 2008. Amakula organizes several interesting workshops, which I have attended but this is one workshop that had an impact in my life and profession. Through this workshop I was able to learn more about handling a camera in relation to the light available and [had the chance to] watch various contemporary documentaries, which influenced me so much, as each had its own interesting style that kept you glued to the screen. This was of great impact as I specialize in documentary making and it felt good to see what one can achieve using various styles of telling a story.

After the workshop I got on the road and applied some of the knowledge acquired in shooting a trailer for my upcoming feature length documentary.

## BAYIMBA CULTURAL FOUNDATION

### (4) A drop in the bucket

*Author* : Sam Lutaaya

*Activity* : Bayimba International Festival, 1st and 2nd editions. Dance Week Festivals

*Story collected by* : David Kaiza

*Date and place* : 21 October 2009 | Kampala, Uganda

I am a dancer and I work with Mutumizi dance-theatre company, a contemporary dance company. We perform, we train, we choreograph, run workshops, basically anything to do with dance, if you need it, we can do it.

Since we started in November 2007, we've had the opportunity to perform at different festivals. We performed at the Dance Week festival and we were there when Bayimba International Festival started; we were actually the opening act, and we performed to... ten people! Actually it was more, we performed to the artists and the crew as well!

It was a flop by Ugandan standards, very few people, but it was a start. Ugandans believe that only if you have many people, it's a success. I believe what is important is that it is artistically coherent. So, I don't give up, I'm in it and I believe in what Bayimba is doing, and I believe that they believe in what we are doing.

For the first festival we were invited by Bayimba to work with different artists, to create some sort of East African dance, which we didn't manage to do because I think we underestimated the task. There are so many influences: in Uganda we have 56 dances, how do you represent all those? And then in Kenya there are so many, in Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi. You can't really say that you are going to do it in two weeks. I was interviewing a junior lecturer at the dance department in Makerere University, and he actually let me know, to my shock, that contemporary dance has been around for almost three decades already. This may shock some of you, it shocked me, and I'm a dancer! So that's the problem: people don't know about this art-form because we haven't had the opportunity to really take it out there and, in a way, it's like contemporary art, you look at it and you're like 'that belongs to the white man, only foreigners interpret it better. Let's stay with our traditional dances'. Otherwise, most of dance performances have been based on Hip Hop dances. We understand hip-hop because it gives us this nice emotional high.

Both in the Dance Week festival and in the Bayimba festival, most performances of contemporary dance have a mainly expatriate audience; Ugandans don't necessarily follow it because it's not for them, it's new, it's too complex for them. I think in a way that's also our fault because we've not given them time, we've not fed them from the baby stage to the adult stage; we give them the hard stuff straight away. So I can understand the distance they want to keep from it.

Come this year, we were invited again to perform at Bayimba Festival, and there was a contemporary dance workshop led by James Mweu from Kenya. It was an interesting experience because we had four Ugandans as a part of it, then there were dancers from Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda. We kind of had this exchange of ideas, ways of working, and although James was the overall moderator of the whole thing, he created a piece for us.

I would say that for me, the experience of working with different cultures kind of changed the way I related with them, because I felt that a dancer from Kenya or Tanzania or Rwanda is not the same as a dancer from Uganda. And even if you brought them together, you kind of compared different countries, they are not the same because different cultural experiences inform the way in which we work. Ugandans have been known to be lazy but I can assure you that Tanzanians are a lot slower, and the Kenyans are 'chi-chi-chi' [faster]... I mean, even the nature of their dances in themselves: Ugandan dances, generally, the way I see them, are

calm and it's not about, ok, there is energy and there are points where you have energy but it's not about complex movements. Kenyan dancing is more about the technique of the movement, you know? In Uganda though we've not been exposed too much to contemporary dance, we kind of bring from our background of traditional dance, so it's not necessarily too complex.

Anyway, this experience gave me an opportunity to learn that everyone's differences should be celebrated, and just because you're different doesn't mean you're wrong. That's what I love about contemporary dance, because I could walk from here to there and back, and I could do that for 10 minutes and I've said something. Now, you're probably wondering what have I said, but if I put a title to it and I give you a synopsis, you say 'ah, ok, so this is what he was saying, so this is how he expressed himself'. Or I was told about a performance where a guy stared at a light bulb for 10 minutes then he walked off, and that was it! It was a performance, but it's classified as contemporary dance.

So I've learnt that there is that freedom of expression, and with that I was able to get a deeper understanding of why this dance form is popular in Europe, because people were tired of the rules. And people like me who like to rebel against the establishment find this dance form quite liberating. I met some people from Nairobi during the workshop this year, and one of them recommended to me to do a workshop in Kenya, something I've never done before. Now this was, what, two years after studying contemporary dance, and already I'm conducting a workshop. People take years to do that, you know? It was an honour for me. It was scary as well, but I felt this was my opportunity to make my mark, I'm not going to sit back and say 'oh, because I've done this and this and nobody else did it, then that means I'm qualified'. No, I dance because I want to and I need to.

Thanks to Bayimba I got a chance to be exposed even further. As a dancer I needed to make progress very fast, to make a mark. I have a goal I need to achieve. When I studied dance, I felt that people didn't have the opportunity to develop, and they really wanted to. There are so many people out there who want to dance but don't get the opportunity to, and by getting that exposure I build a reputation, a credibility. That means I can have a voice, and I can speak for those who don't have it. In the long run, I can get those opportunities to them, even if it's through me, if I have to train and then train them, for me that's a plus.

Exposure, for me, means that I get to perform in a lot more places, and if you're not exposed as an artist, then you don't move. If you aren't exposed then you are nothing, even if you are the best writer or dancer in the whole universe. If I have never read anything from you or haven't seen you perform, I don't know you. I have no way to know.

I performed a solo at the Dance Week this year, before the 2nd Bayimba Festival, and when I was rehearsing it I had a couple of friends who came by to watch it, and they were impressed by what I'd done. Not because they didn't think I could do it, but because they had known me since before I started dancing, and they saw me for the first time I performed at Dance Week and I was just doing my own things, but now they realized they had an understanding of what contemporary dance was, and I could express myself and be understood. So for me, the affirmation I got from them made me feel like, yes, I have finally found my place here, and now it's time to move forward. For all this time it's been about making a point of 'I can do this, I can do this', but when they finally said 'wow', I'm thinking, ok, now, this is the start... For so long I wanted to dance and I wasn't able to, I was ready to grab on to anything. And for me I could say the turning point happened the moment I entered a dance studio and I took my first class, I'm thinking- finally, this is the beginning of the journey. All the things that had happened to me had led me to this point. So by the time Bayimba came, the train had really started moving, it was going, going, it can only go faster now.

I have a dream to start a performing arts school, of course starting with dance, eventually go to music and theatre. Because I believe the arts in themselves are all meant to be one element. That's why you find that musical theatre works a lot, because it combines music, dance and drama, so it's more engaging. Even in Africa, our dances tend to have a theatrical element, and storytelling and all that. More exposure gives you reputation and reputation means that if I write a project for funding, then someone says 'Sam did this, he worked with this one and this one and this one and this one', and they're big to them, they're significant, [they will conclude] 'then that means he must have something worth funding'. Maybe credibility would be the right word, to be able to command that respect. Not for my own selfish reasons because I don't need the fame, as Sam. But I need the fame so I can get to where I want to go.

I've wanted to dance since I was a child, and I've only started recently which was about 5 years ago. So imagine childhood to adulthood, all that gap, all that is time that was lost. If I had studied from when I was a child up to now, I'd be a lot different. But I'm not disgruntled, no. I think there's a reason why. I think the reason is so I can be motivated to want this for other people, because if I had had that opportunity from childhood, I'd probably be selfish, I'd be thinking 'me, me, me'. But now I'm thinking 'I didn't have it, now I have it and this is how I feel', and there are kids out there who want it, who I believe can benefit from it. So now if I get trained, I can train them, because right now I'm a dance instructor, I choreograph, that's what I do, that's my contribution, that's my drop in the bucket -it's not the whole bucket, it's a drop, and many drops make the full bucket.

## **(5) If we combine hands we can eventually move on.**

*Author* : Xenson Ssenkaaba

*Activity* : Bayimba Contemporary Art workshop in 2008 as a tutor Coordinator of the Contemporary Art Workshop at Bayimba Festival, 2008 and 2009. Speaker at the forums of Bayimba Festival 2009

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes

*Date and place* : 21 October 2009 | Kampala, Uganda

I want to explain that in the African context when we do things or when there are festivals, it's usually not an individual benefiting from it, it's usually a collective of people. It could be the artists, it could be the audience, there could be different beneficiaries. Then I find it a little hard [to point out] what I [personally] gained out, for instance, from Bayimba.

I'm an artist, to begin with, and with art I mean art in its totality, because I believe somewhere all the arts are interrelated or interlinked. And this brings me back to the African essence: you find yourself, the way you are brought up, that you're singing at the bonfire, you're telling a story, you're maybe even doing body painting or scarification, that you are involved in all different forms of arts.

So along the way, as Faisal was trying to start up the Bayimba Foundation, I happened to be around. Originally I consider myself an artist and that's it, maybe a curator of the arts, maybe a promoter of the arts. So when Faisal approached me to be a tutor for the art workshops, at first I didn't really consider myself an inspiration. Maybe that's what opened the door, you know, for people to look at me more like an inspiration than like an artist doing something for their community. I think artists are passionate, we want to do things, maybe we want to inform the policy makers, we are mirrors of society and we need to address issues, we are very conscious about what happens. So usually our role is to be able to inform the policy makers, or to inform the people about what they are losing or what they need to gain. Within that, I think the immediate benefit for me was to be able to work or to be given chance through Bayimba to share what I've experienced as an artist, and also to share with the different artists who attended some of the art workshops, but also through the different cultural debates. Also, to be able to inform, because I think Bayimba is a platform to inform especially the policy makers, also the audiences, the Ugandan people, to look at culture. Because today there is a debate on, for instance, the economic essence of the creative industry: does it contribute to society?, or to the Ugandan economy in that matter? But also, what's our contribution as artists to the global culture movement?

In Uganda there were no platform where elements of different arts could gather to discuss issues related to politics of culture. So the Bayimba forums bridged that gap between the arts, also at a national level. This stimulated and contributed to the debates which were already there, up to the point that recently a law on copyright has been discussed in the parliament.

So through the debates, the discussions and the feedback [that happened at Bayimba Festival], I think it was good to have all these people, like-minded people, different artists, different critics and curators to sit around a table and discuss, knowing that there is someone out there seeing and watching, I think it was very interesting. Also, [it was important for me] the interaction through the art workshops, to share ideas with different artists from Burundi, Rwanda, Kenya. The word passion comes in, in that it gives you pleasure. It may not be in monetary terms, but it gives you life, you know, to keep on keeping on, because [you realize that] there are people out there who are appreciating.

Then, of course, the other direct benefit was from the projects we've been working on. When we started the Bonfire and the Hip-hop Network, of course the immediate person I talked to after Ugly was Faisal, through Bayimba, to help us with a couple of things because they had the space. So they've been helping us through the times, here and there, sometimes financially, sometimes providing infrastructure, and for me on a personal note, it's encouraging, it keeps you moving. It's not easy to set up something, especially if you are passionate, and of course, as I speak, I think Bayimba is the only probably sponsor we have right now.

Yet we wanted, through the Hip-hop Africa Network, to connect the Ugandan hip-hop community, but also have chapters in the rest of Africa.

I've happened to go to different festivals and also different community events, with different countries, especially in Africa, most of them are youth related or hip-hop related. And within the meetings and the communications we found out that we needed a platform to connect the hip-hop within the continent. So there are some people on the ground in South Africa, in Johannesburg and Cape Town, in Nairobi, in Tanzania, in Senegal, in Burkina Faso, in Niger, in Mali, and hopefully we will go to Nigeria and all over.

It's a huge thing; my role was actually to start something within Uganda, then eventually to have an African festival, a hip-hop festival where to have different people telling their stories. At the moment, if you look at the African continent, on average 70% of Africans are young people, in Uganda I think it's 67% of Ugandans are young people, that's from the age of 5 to 27. Because of that, of course there are other issues which come in- there is culture, there is identity, but then also there is hip-hop, which is a global phenomenon, and today if you look, even through the UN reports, it says that you can reach 80% of the youth through hip-hop culture- globally, not just Africa.

The way today to communicate to young people is through hip-hop. But then hip-hop has its roots in the States. Of course there is a debate that actually the origin of hip-hop is African, taken by the slaves through the Caribbean; eventually it came out through the black African-Americans and started in the Bronx. But the hip-hop that we know or that could have emanated from the Bronx, its cultural essence somehow gets lost, and the way it started, it started as a rebellious music art form, by the youth, to talk about issues like racism, police brutality and all that. It eventually became a global movement and eventually Africans, especially the youth, became a part of that. But then, as we've been debating, what's our contribution as Africans, to this culture, as African youth? And our contribution is to dig deep into our traditions and cultures and not just be a part of the whole global hip-hop movement but also to be contributors of that movement.

One consequence of the hip hop network, for instance, is that youth has become more active addressing issues of corruption in their songs. The hip-hop network also held forums where these issues were discussed. Members of the parliament and the government started attending these forums and they took the issues to the parliament and lobbied to call the attention towards targeting youth problems like unemployment.

So that's the whole reason behind the hip-hop network, and that's why maybe the importance of Bayimba coming in, trying to involve Bayimba, because Bayimba is a cultural institution, it's helping to promote the culture [and culture can create these changes]. So we thought that if we combine hands and they assist us then we can eventually, you know, move on.

## **(6) Stella and Juliet**

*Author* : Stella Atal

*Activity* : Street Fashion Workshop at Bayimba International Festival of Music and Arts, 2009

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes and David Kaiza

*Date and place* : 21 October 2009 | Kampala

I was invited to participate in the first Bayimba Festival in 2008 and from what I saw happening I thought the organisers had started something really good to promote culture in Uganda through music, art and design. I was called upon during the second Bayimba Festival in 2009 and requested to make a fashion workshop for people with a story to tell.

Faisal Kiwewa [director of Bayimba Cultural Foundation] gave me the chance to choose the people I wanted to work with in the workshop, so I said to him I'd really love to work with the community, I would really appreciate it. We got people who were not really established as designers but people who want to learn how to design, people who have a story behind to tell, not just doing it because that's the only solution or alternative they can have. We also gathered a group of kids, some of them from vocational centres, some abductees of Kony from Northern Uganda, and others were from NGO's, like AIDS organisations. We had a group of 20 people from different places and also different designers doing jewellery, clothes, shoes.

We had a workshop for four days. At the beginning of the workshop when I started teaching the children the basic things about fashion we realized that the kids from the vocational centres, who had been there for almost two years, they didn't know anything; their teachers were also shocked about this. The kids were telling me- 'you are teaching us things that are so different from what they are teaching'. So I asked, 'what were they teaching you?' You know, they have teachers who are also illiterate about the subject. Instead of trying to help these kids to come up, they're instead giving them what we call poison. The kids couldn't even cut with scissors; the kids couldn't even describe fashion, what fashion is. At the end of four days we realized that while we worked with them, the teachers were actually also learning, because they realized that in those four days the kids became able to cut for themselves the outfits, they were able to sketch, and they were able to sew.

During the festival each one had to showcase two outfits. The public could not believe that those girls came knowing nothing, but because they had that interest in what we were doing, they caught up so quickly and were able to do something to show to the public what they could do [after only] four days [of] being in the workshop. I found it really amazing because they touched people's hearts.

People thought these were kids who didn't have a future, and some of them are taken to such vocational centres, they are forced to do something because there's no other alternative for what they could do. But then if you help them just there, when they come and say 'I don't know what I want to do, I don't know what I want to be in the future', if [at that point] you have someone who can help you at least to concentrate on a certain thing, who can help you and advise you on what is good for you or what you can do for your future, that is a good thing.

One case that touched me deeply was one girl called Juliet who had been living with cripples for the last 6 years. During the workshop she was telling us the story of how she was abducted, how she spent that time in a cave being used by the rebels, and when the UPDF guys got her back, all her parents were gone, all her relatives were gone, and then she was just in a village doing nothing. She was taken up by the missionaries to Kalangula island, and there she was put in a vocational course where she was learning how to sew. But then she wasn't sure, she didn't have any hope in life, she was like, 'I don't care if I live or not. I don't see any reason for me living, I don't have relatives, I don't have anyone'. [She explained to me] 'I was just there to be, but my mind was somewhere else, and the fact that I'd been abused by these people for so many years, all the time I could not concentrate in class, I would just be there, taking the test; while they try teaching at me, I'm thinking about the life I've been living for the past six years.'

[I was stricken by her story because] she hadn't had a choice, she was just held from school by the rebels and they just got them as a group. So these kids didn't have a choice to run. And even her escaping, it was just by coincidence, because she told us they were shifting from that cave where they were and taking them to another place. And then, in the middle of the journey, the UPDF saw them and they started shooting, the rebels took off, so they shot her, she has a hole here in her shoulder, when she was carrying jerry cans and big saucepans. The first three shots got the jerry can and the saucepan, but the last two got her in the shoulder. And even when the missionaries met her, she was brought to the surgeon because she had to undergo an operation to remove the last bullets. She had been living with that wound for six full years. They could only put salt because they didn't have any medication, she was just inside a cave. They were using her, she had this rotten wound, they couldn't even take her anywhere, they were just telling her to put salt, so by the time she got out it was rotten.

So I asked her in the workshop 'ok, what did you learn? She said I can't tell you that I learnt this or this, because if you tell me to do this I'm not sure if I'm going to do it'. So I said, 'ok, was there anything interesting which captured your concentration?' She said yes. I said 'what was that?' She said, 'ok, I loved, when you were teaching us how to make shirts I really picked up the interest'. I said 'why?'; and she answered, 'because I felt it was something I could do, it doesn't take a lot of concentration, if I learn how to

cut, I can sew it, so at least I have two or three hours of concentration, I don't need to take a lot of time thinking about the design, this and that'. I said 'ok, if I teach you how to do that, can you sit in a place and mass produce them?' She said yes. So we started with that, and after the first three days she made a very good shirt and she was like 'maybe if I can also make the shorts to match the shirt, I think I'd be so grateful because if I get clients and they want a shirt, I can advise them, ok you can buy this shirt and buy the shorts as well.'

There was a friend who was also attending the workshop from a vocation (course) in town, and she said 'ok, today I'm going to teach you, because we learnt how to make shirts and I can do it perfectly so I'm going to teach you'. So during that time Juliet learnt not only from me but also from the people, and then she shared her story with everyone and everyone felt pity. She was like 'ok, now if I have something which I cannot find in my mind, at least I can stop thinking about what happened to my life, what happened to my parents, I have something I'm doing and I think that can help me to get a better future and a happy life. If I learn to do this, then I can do it for a living, because there is no-one to look after me, I don't have anyone remaining, apart from the friends and people who are there to see that I make a better future'.

What I was trying to do was to find something that could make her concentrate and forget about her past. Because the men in that vocation class teach them a variety of things, but they don't care if they've learnt or not. But for me, at this workshop I needed to understand where her interest lied, and then I tried to help her to devote to that interest.

Normally I work with different social workers and I go to different organizations. What I do is just to help people, to use my talent to develop the lives of the people, to help them to get something for themselves, They call me, I try to teach them what I can, to help them to get something to do for themselves. But normally when I go to help them out in the community, I help them as a whole.

But then this time I was able to listen to them individually, from all the different places they were coming from. Compared to the rest of the group, her story was different, it was touching that at that point she could make public all what happened to her. Most of them, they would have just committed suicide, even after they had survived from being killed by the rebels. I think her story, and the way, you know... she still has pain in her arm, she's still traumatized, but then she could say 'ok, I've come, I want to learn now, and I want to share my story with whoever can listen, and I'm ready to change'.

I just learnt that sometimes, you look at someone and then you're there with your conclusions... Because if she hadn't told me that story I would have thought maybe she was not serious, because she was not concentrating. But then you need to take time to listen to someone's problem before you judge.

Bayimba has helped me meet my dream in a successful way. I have always wanted to use my talent to help the vulnerable. This is something I have done before Bayimba, trying to help different organisations looking after such kids, but at the end I got so hurt because I did my best but never saw any change with the kids, I have organised many charity fashion shows and art exhibitions where lot of money has been raised but I never get to see where it goes. With Bayimba I have seen them meeting their commitments however small.

I make fashion shows, my own fashion shows, but then on the other side, I also work for the community. You can give money to someone to go and do something for him or herself, but if I have a talent and I can share that talent to transform the lives of others, I think that's better compared to the money. If I give you knowledge, that knowledge is going to carry on. You are going to use it for the future. How long are we going to wait for that? There are so many people suffering, and you don't expect donors to come and relieve everyone, they don't even know most of them. So if us citizens don't come up to say, 'Ok, we are going to help these people', I don't think there's much that's going to be changed; then we will always be called a third world country.

## **(7) I no longer see myself as a local artist**

*Author* : Abbas Hassan Mohammed Ibrahim Amin, aka Ugly MC

*Activity* : Bayimba International Festival 2009

*Story collected by* : Claudia Fontes

*Date and place* : 21 October 2009 | Kampala

My name is Abbas Hassan Mohammed Ibrahim Amin, but please call me Ugly, Ugly MC.

I'm a hip-hop artist, a social worker, counsellor, an activist, an actor, scriptwriter, film-maker, the list is endless. I'm a Nubian, my mother is a Nubian and my father is a Kakwa, Kakwas are still Nubians. I'm one of the grandchildren of the late Idi Amin, the former president of Uganda, rest in peace.

I grew up in Nairobi, not in Uganda, but I was born in Zaire in 1983, October 20th. I spent most of my time in the Democratic Republic of Congo in Lilongo, Kenya, and Tanzania.

Back in Uganda, I was staying in the suburbs of Kampala, in Naguru. I can say that my area was more dangerous than Kisenyi, most of the young people had guns, and crime was at its highest rate. Most of the boys would do drugs, most of them would just go to prison, day in, day out, to them going to prison in Lusira was like going for holidays. Since these were my people, I was like, man, we need to make a change here. Then I decided to start up a hip-hop project at the teenage centre where I was working in, Naguru Teenage Centre. Because you know, hip-hop brings young people closer, you can easily communicate to young people. The project is called Arise Hip-hop Uganda and it is actually aimed to fight crime, drug abuse, HIV Aids and other social issues.

Since Hip-Hop is an urban culture [it was fitting with] where I was staying, as its actually an urban zone where everyone wants to be a gangster, everyone wants to steal, everyone wants to do the bad thing, because maybe this is what he or she is watching on TV. So I was so curious, I was like, if this thing starts up at least we could do something. Step by step it did something and I'm glad that now it has really changed so many young people.

Apart from Arise Hip-hop Uganda, there is another project that I'm working on called The Bonfire, my brother Xenson founded it actually, he came up with the idea. He was like, 'you know what Ugly? We need to come up with something for hip-hop to get a breakthrough in Uganda, we need a podium at the National Theatre to make it more national, so at least the Luga Flow revolution can be pushed forward.'

We started this year, in February 2009, and the Bonfire project is up to today still on. On Wednesdays, young people would come and express themselves through the medium of poetry, storytelling, hip-hop, dance and so many other forms of art.

Bayimba has been sponsoring us with the Bonfire project from day one, sometimes with technical help as well. Also with the project Arise Hip-hop Uganda, in case we need something they come and help us out. In 2009, there was a call for artists for Bayimba Festival, and we didn't hesitate, we went and picked up our forms and registered the two projects, the Bonfire and Arise Hip-hop Uganda. We got a positive reply and we were in the programme. The programme started up with different workshops, the first one was on culture in our society, then there was the role of the media in promoting art, then the role of arts and culture in development, and there was also this question that was raised to the artists: whose responsibility is it to promote the artists? I came to realize that actually myself as an artist and the whole group, we are playing a very important role in fighting all these social issues. We can either develop or destroy. So since then we've been very careful as hip-hop artists, we were like, 'ok, the only thing that you're supposed to do is work hard and make sure we develop our society'.

After the workshops, the big day arrived, the festival started, and on the big day the biggest experience that I had was meeting so many Kenyan and Tanzanian artists who had come here, there was Idi Achieng, she's a very big artist in Kenya, she had the whole band. And there was one of the biggest East African producers called Ambrose [Ambrose "Dunga" Akwabi] of Mandugu Digital. I'm glad that through the connections we did in the festival in 2010 I'll be working on a project with him.

I found the festival so exciting because of the way I marketed myself, marketed the project, and also the art of live music. We, as hip-hop artists, and mostly underground hip-hop artists, we had actually not attended any festival that was so massive and so big like that, and, you know, it was live music. Most of these young people were asking 'Ugly, how are we going to do it?' I said, just close your eyes, since you were in the workshop, the rehearsal is done with the band and all that, we'll just have to go and do it. And when we stepped up on the stage, we were over 20 artists who performed as Arise Hip-hop Uganda. It was so great the way the people embraced hip-hop on that day, I was like, man, this is it, I'm glad that Ugandan hip-hop has taken another step. It was so big for me as a hip-hop artist, for me as a leader and an activist and all that.

And the Bonfire nights has really grown after the festival in June. You'll find that so many people were looking at the night in the beginning as something that maybe was hopeless, that maybe these young people

would not recite poems very well or do something. I'm glad they saw the positive side of it; now they are like, 'ok, these young people can recite poetry'. Because remember that most of these young people are coming from slum areas, others have not attained enough formal education, others have not even gone to school. It was a platform that really changed them completely. And up to today every Wednesday is a different thing, we just have to come and recite the poems, do the nights with acrobatics, with poets and storytellers and so many things, it has really been great since then.

The festival really changed me, because as an artist I no longer see myself as local. Stepping on an international stage, that was my breakthrough moment, I embraced with these other people who have bands, and immediately after the festival we got the opportunity to perform at the World Music Day, you can imagine what that means. But we couldn't have got that opportunity if we were not spotted in such a big stage.

VODAP.org/ SLUM CINEMA

## **(8) A reporter for Kisenyi**

*Author :* Okello Mohammed Fathil

*Activity:* Slum Cinema training workshops in Kampala

*Story collected by:* Claudia Fontes

*Date and place:* 21 October 2009 | Kampala

I am Okello Mohammed Fathil, a member of STREET VOICE, a Youth community based organization in Kisenyi- Kampala Central. I am the general secretary to this organization. We basically sensitize the youth on health related matters on HIV/AIDS, alcohol, drugs, education, counseling, vocation and life skills training, talent identification, etc.

We have departments that we explore with all our efforts: the music department, art department, local kerosene department and the drama department that has just started or cropped up and growing well. Members participate on choice.

It all started with the music, music is one of the successful departments in STREET VOICE. We compose, write and sing, perform songs: we are proud and strongly stand up for it, and credit it; meeting SLUM CINEMA came through music. I am an artist and I normally come to music jam sessions at the National Theater, a place for cultural activities. I normally cross check with the information board to see what's new and of interest to me. On one occasion, I happened to read about the Mohammed Amin Foundation <http://www.moforce.com/instituteprofile.html> and that they were welcoming applications of interested parties to be submitted in.

The next day I met Wasswa (Wasswa Abbey, musician from Kisenyi as well), who told me he had met Mr. Tamale Swaib of VODAP, and he had invited us as slum people to participate in a coming workshop. Together again we met Mr. Tamale at the office, [and] he encouraged [us talking] of the values of that workshop. He added that it would be good if we joined him, and we shall be taught how to capture sound and videos using the facilities provided by SLUM CINEMA.

He said in one week's time the workshop started and we were officially invited to attend. This was a 3 day workshop and it was spearheaded by VODAP, an organization in the slums of Kampala. I started participating and from then on I never stopped.

At the workshop, we were introduced to Mr. Gerald Bueters from Basic Views who was conducting it. He told us that with time, we were going to learn things in photography, screen documentaries, create video-reports, networking, and editing good storytelling, etc.

I personally attended the workshop, and after those 3 days, things had in fact started to change. I had the big concept, vision about Slum Cinema and what I was becoming, I already felt like a reporter.

We were informed that we were students of Slum Cinema and that we would be taking up the mentioned courses, we would apply what we had studied, and would put it into practice at the main office of VODAP. This was to be done everyday; we were taught how to handle cameras, video editing, making video-reports, music videos, documentary filmmaking and good story telling among others.

I generally improved and at this time in memory, I am able to take notes about any important information, interesting issues and stories in my community -Kisenyi, and else where. In fact, it is interesting that now I am known as a reporter within my community and in case of news, interesting issues, reports or anything, I am normally called for to take up the issue.

I have got sources I can sell my reports and news to. I have friends in NTV Kenya, UBC , NBC. Every time an interesting story comes up in my locality, I cover it and contact them. They buy them from me or they tell me 'if you want us to buy this, then develop it to this extent'. It has become a professional job for me, I am diverting from music and now concentrating onto that.

It's very meaningful to me because I value it as a professional job and somewhere in my dreams I have always wanted to become a filmmaker/reporter.

I am now contented that half of my dream has been achieved; soon I will start to write short films based on my community.

## **(9) The video camera as an instrument for peace**

*Author :* Okello Mohammed Fathil

*Activity:* video productions for young musicians

*Story collected by:* Claudia Fontes

*Date and place:* 21 October 2009 | Kampala

I used to be a musician but now I am not so much into music because I have realized I have a professional job to do as a reporter in my locality [Kisenyi] cause this people can voice out in music and they can voice out in images. I've participated in making musical videos for slum youth who cannot pay for it or are disadvantaged and yet they have meaningful songs for the society; for example a song on child sacrifice and mistreating of children cannot go ignored by me.

I have done videos for one of a youth member who is a gospel singer, he was in jail six years and he was coming out. When he went out, I talked him and helped him do his videos free of charge, and right now he is earning, he is singing his songs in churches and selling his songs and the video, they watch it.

Right now I am encouraging a local jam session in my community every Sunday where the youth come and perform, sing their songs, and act plays. We have our data of songs recorded and kept in video format. It has helped in a way that the performer sees their performance and it is real and not biased.

These videos of the jam sessions has helped the youth on how to be good actors in plays by knowing how to behave in front of the camera. Also on Sundays we screen the video of the jam session where the youth would have sung educating songs on various issues and the community learns from them. In fact as the community gathers to see the artists and the plays we educate them on VCT, AIDS and the sanitation, and ask questions on other issues.

It is meaningful in that both the youth and community members appreciate it and it is helping the community to change positively towards AIDS and their sanitation and it identifies talent amongst the children who see it and also perform for the community. It is meaningful to me to achieve goals and the youth have been motivated that they can access videos for their music through my efforts. It is also paying and I am able to sustain myself through it and it's what I do and talk about.

I have also realized that the camera acts as a peace instrument in many occasions in fights, quarrels, as soon as the fellows see the camera... they tend to shy away and stop it so that they are not seen over the TVs and in news or request not to be captured on the press. The youth have changed in behavior as they see they have the hope to live as decent citizens.

## **(10) We used to be invisible, but now we are visible.**

*Author : Wasswa Abbey*

*Activity: Slum Cinema training workshops in Kampala*

*Story collected by: Claudia Fontes*

*Date and place: 21 October 2009 | Kampala*

My name is Wasswa Abbey, I'm a musician, I play guitar, but my focus is vocalist. I'm here thanks to Vodap, I'm a member of Street Voice. Street Voice is located in Kisenyi, one of the most notorious slums in the whole country. In Street Voice we work with street children, mainly those who hang around in the slums. Street Voice is just located one kilometer from Vodap. I came to know about Slum Cinema through Vodap.

Vodap is an organization for disadvantaged people, so we were their first priority for this workshop in 2008. During the first workshop we attended I learnt about editing, filming. In fact I thought as a musician I have nothing to do with editing and filming, but then at the end of the workshop I noticed that I needed this programme, because as a musician I have to record my songs, I have to make videos about them. So by the end of it, it became very important. The skills I got at the workshop have really helped me as I managed to make a song without even paying money, because Vodap has equipment, so I could use that equipment to make my songs and my video.

It was important to me because I used to lack professionalism. I was not looking at that, I thought I could write my songs. If I wanted to create a song, I created a song. I would just write it and keep notes. But the workshop has changed me, in that I have to save my things on a CD, so it has changed me to do things professionally. Many times I could misplace my things, sometimes I would have a lot of books, but this has really changed me. I can even have maybe just a flash disk or a CD, where I can carry a lot of messages, while before I used to have books. So it has changed me in that way.

I come from the slums, and people neglect people who are in the slum, so, in the first place, I had no chance to be noticed. But now since I finished the workshops, since I joined Vodap, I've been noticed by other musicians, I have even managed to sell a song written by me, 'Kiwaani', to Bobi Wine, a great musician in Uganda, and the song was really a hit. I wrote this song back in 2005, I had not recorded it anywhere, we were just singing it in the village, every kid could sing this song, so I was even tired of this song. I managed to sell that song just after being taught that video and filming is important. When we started editing we were noticed, and they came to me to ask me to sell this song. I think if I had that idea before, I would have sold that song [earlier], it would have made money for me. But it was through Vodap that I managed to get noticed, and even to sell a song.

There was no way I could pass that barrier [on my own], because I was just a street singer. Many times I could sing it in slums, and people would just listen to it and go, some people could not even remember it. So it was like a song just for me. And I believe if I had had some recorders and video [equipment], I would have recorded this song and maybe it would have sold by then. So when we got these gadgets, they helped, even to our group Street Voice, to be noticed and we are even preparing ourselves to sell other songs.

When you look at music, mostly in slums, it's not easy to pass through, I mean to succeed, because you need a lot of money, you need to go in the studio, you need to publish. But when you look at the advantages we have now, we can record our songs, we can even make video from our songs. Not only that, we can even do our own documentaries. Which has made us earn some money, even been noticed by other organizations, even the government. Because before nobody could come in the ghetto to do business in the slums. There are no good roads there. There is no security even: somebody could just harass you and no one would care. But since we can put the things on video, now you see security there, we have good clinics, they're even now constructing good roads. And I believe it's because of the documentaries, reports, and even video that we have been doing. We were invisible, but now we are visible.

This has made the people in our area happy, since we started learning to edit, the people in our area are even happy to have cameras shooting at them, not like before. Before, if you would come with a camera in the slum, you were in trouble, they would just break it. But since Vodap came in [with the Slum Cinema

workshops], we learnt how to make screenings, because every Sunday we screen in many ghettos. Now people are used to the camera, they don't hate cameras anymore.

The camera in Kisenyi used to be the enemy, and now it's a tool to help the people, it's something to bridge the people's problems to the government. So it's not the enemy anymore, it's like a gun to them. If you attack the people in Kisenyi, many times they can even call us. Now in Kisenyi, they know him [Okello Mohammed Fathil, another member of Street Voice], and they'll just call him or call me, they say 'bring the camera, some people are just harassing us'. So the camera is no more an enemy, it's a weapon to help them [to defend themselves].

And we believe that if we really had these gadgets, it could go even further than that. Because when you look at it, in slums there are many breaking news, you'll find very interesting news at any time. Like recently, there are people who make aluminium, they boil aluminium to make saucepans. But one group went to buy old scrap, and they bought a bomb [without knowing], and put it in the saucepan to melt it, they blew the fire and everybody was around. So in just a few minutes it blasted, people died, and we recorded these things. It was a good thing that by then we were working together with Slum Cinema. Immediately the police came in, medical care was around. But before, nobody would have known that there was an incident like that in the slums.

## **(11) The dream of my life**

*Author* : Wamala Frey

*Activity*: Slum Cinema training workshop in Kisenyi, Kampala

*Story collected by*: David Kaiza

*Date and place*: 21 October 2009, Kampala, Uganda

My name is Frey Wamala, a Ugandan by nationality. I have been in the United Kingdom since 2003 to September 2008. I left UK on deportation after proving me for having worked without a visa and overstayed. I came back to Kampala escorted by three guards on me and handcuffed as if I was such a criminal and I think this was so much a torture to my entire life. I had nothing in my pockets, however I had worked so much in the U K. Neither did I come with any clothes except the ones I had on me. Arriving at Entebbe International Airport I didn't even have any transport to Kampala but this is where I have to thank God that I sweet-talked the taxi-driver who then favored me with a drive home.

At this time I was not myself any more because I had a feeling of committing suicide since I was useless then. I thought so much that that was the end for me because I had nowhere to start from. My brother Abdul Shaqul Bamweyana felt tougher and connected me to one of his friends, Mr. Tamale Swaibu from Voice of the Disadvantaged People (VODAP), who was running a training workshop of the Slum Cinema project, teaching people how to bridge the information gap by filming and editing short documentaries.

I was made to register as a member and joined there and then. After the workshop some members never came back, but I continued with the daily activities of the organization since I had nothing else to do. I kept going to the field to capture short films and made sure to capture breaking news and had them edited by myself.

As if that was not enough I could go to some parts of the slum and show teaching films most especially of AIDS/HIV, I had to explain to the people whatever I had screened.

This helped a lot with improving my communication skills, and self-control as far as getting out of my personal trauma. I cannot forget to say that it also helped me to learn how to handle people of different backgrounds.

Working with Slum Cinema was so hectic because sometimes we could even go to the field without lunch and transport back home, yet we had to come back every other day. But I thank God we are through all that because Slum cinema has started getting payable contracts. So all this has taught me how to work in tough conditions.

Since we have done a lot of documentaries, tutorials and other news stories [with Slum Cinema], I cannot forget the time we toured around Uganda with the former president of the Uganda North American Association president Lt Frank Musisi (US Army officer), making a documentary about the government's developments to stop the war in Northern Uganda.

In this project I was the cameraman, which helped a lot to know where I stand in my personality. It also sparked my ability to stand in front of very big people and handle tougher decisions. I had never stood behind a camera before, and I had never stood before people. But when I went behind the camera, I didn't feel a problem. There was no time to think, as to wonder what had happened to me, so in that sense Slum Cinema hold me in a way that I can't think that [committing suicide] anymore. I had to act, they kept me busy.

After knowing that now I was someone who could make something on my own without being a burden to any other person, having that massive feeling that now I am somebody, then I remembered the dream of my life: I started up my own artwork project. Before going to the UK I had made art, I was a painter. I started drawing and then I started to think of the market. I chose to do abstract painting on barkcloth, to promote the barkcloth in Uganda, for other Ugandans and internationally. Thinking of the market, I thought my production is probably low, so I thought of engaging people in. But then I thought that engaging old people [adults] would cost me a lot, because after one year they would look at me and say well I think I want to do my own as well. So then I thought maybe if I start with young stars (9-14 year old), wanting to work big as far as money is concerned, maybe we will be producing more and big. And they have got talents, which are hidden.

## MAISHA FILM LAB

### (12) Now I Write Humorous And Light Stories

*Author* : Dilman Dila

*Activity*: Assignment from Maisha Film Lab and UNICEF to film in North Uganda in 2008.

*Story collected by*: David Kaiza

*Date and place*: 21 October 2009, Kampala, Uganda

In 2008, Maisha Film Lab in collaboration with UNICEF assigned me a task to make a short documentary that UNICEF would use in a global advocacy campaign to drum up support for Uganda's efforts to attain the Millennium Development Goals. I had never handled a project of this magnitude, but I had experienced crew and mentors to rely on, for Maisha is a training school where you learn from knowledgeable practitioners from India, Europe and Hollywood.

At times I felt that the mentors were dragging me into a direction I did not want to go, mainly because the culture in which they grew up is so different from mine, so my storytelling point of view would conflict with theirs. However, I learnt such a great deal that I produced quality work, which convinced UNICEF to hand me this task.

Professionally, this task gave me experience and exposure at an international level. Personally, it changed my life in so many ways.

I had to work in Karamoja and Acholi regions with the worst development statistics in Uganda, to produce a message of hope and opportunity, in the midst of all the misery. I had been to Acholi before as it is my mother's land. The beauty of Acholi songs, the enchanting dances and captivating drums never appeared in the news, only ghastly stories about Joseph Kony. When I visited Karamoja, a place I had never been too, my first impression was that I had stepped into an exotic land, much like Dorothy waking up in Oz. The people were fascinating and beautiful, strong and proud in culture, colorful in dress, the land looked like a precious painting. I could not believe that such a wonderful place was always in the negative news for famine and cattle rustling. It opened my eyes about how to present Africa in the media.

Much like a casting director chooses actors, I talked to selected groups of children, to hear their stories and pick the lead characters for the documentary. I thought I was prepared to hear what they had to say, for they

are always in the news as victims of Kony and cattle rustling. Yet their tales touched my heart in a way I can never describe.

When I finished the film, I wrote a screenplay. I gave it to a friend to criticize it. She was astonished. She asked, "Where are the corpses? The gore? The dark murders?" for my stories always fitted the film-noir and horror genres. (An actress freaked out during the shoot of my 'What Happened in Room 13', as she was drenched in blood and had to be buried alive.)

Now here I was writing a love story. It had its sad moments and no happy ending, but it was a story on the 'light side' of human nature, and that's when I realized that my encounter with the children in Acholi and Karamoja had changed my life. For the better.

My imagination can never create anything as dark as what these children experienced. My writings now suddenly seemed trivial, so petty, for each time I thought about them, I heard a child telling me how he killed another child. Truth is darker than fiction. If Steven King talked to them, he would stop writing those horrible books.

A strong temptation to film these stories attacked me, but the smile on 'Lucy's' face as she narrated how she helped a child mother return to school, in spite of all the stigma and trauma of giving birth at fourteen, told me what these children wanted to talk about. They were fatigued with talking about their nightmares, the communities fed up with being Villages of Horrors. They wanted to talk about the good things in their lives, like school, so I made a film about them helping other children stay in school in spite of the extraordinary odds against them.

This then is my most significant change. I finally found my niche. I now write humorous and light stories. No dark stuff. It is important to me because I now feel free and mature as a writer. Writing dark fiction is depressing. You end up a paranoid loner like H.P. Lovecraft, or a substance abuser like Edgar A Poe and Steven King. I no longer have nightmares. I stopped smoking. I now have more friends than I can count and I have fallen in love twice within a year without breaking my heart.

### **(13) To shine or not to shine after being trained, that is the question.**

*Author* : Judith Adong

*Activity*: Maisha Film Lab training.

*Story collected by*: Claudia Fontes

*Date and place*: 21 October 2009, Kampala, Uganda

I am ADONG Lucy Judith from Uganda. In 1990 when I was at the primary school level of my education, I watched my first African film -The Consequences- a film from Zimbabwe, and I knew that's what I wanted to do with my life. It's against this background that I enrolled for a drama course at Makerere University. But my dream was not really fulfilled when I found out that the department was biased towards theatre. Nevertheless I did well in my course.

Before graduating I got my first big writing job on a popular Ugandan radio serial drama 'Rock Point 256', where a big miracle happened: I met the makers of 'The Consequences'. I shared with one of them my interest in film and he gave me some basic information. Then I launched a search on internet for whatever information I could help myself with while keeping in dialogue with him.

And then, in 2005 I heard about Maisha Film Lab and did everything in my powers to embrace every Maisha opportunities. I benefited from several Maisha Film Lab writers' workshops and finally made it to the Lab itself in 2008. Maisha has brought a lot of meaning into my film-making life.

Firstly it has given me hands-on skills beyond those I could have achieved through internet search or interaction with the makers of The Consequences. It polished my scriptwriting skills and gave me the first chance in directing for the screen since my script was one of the three selected for production during the 2008 Lab, with the resultant 15mins film 'DownCast'.

It has built a pool of not only skilled but professional committed man-power in film which I am proud to be a part of. Whenever I want to work on a production, I know where to get all the professionals I need, not just in Uganda, but in Kenya and Tanzania as well. Plus I have also been able to get one or two film jobs through the Maisha network. The biggest and most significant has been being a writer on the first East African Mnet television drama series 'The Agency'.

Through the Maisha network, IVAD International Film Production, a production house owned by a Ugandan Maisha Film Lab alumnus, fell in love with one of my short film scripts. We entered into collaboration and managed to raise funding through international film funds. The film, now adapted into a full feature film called 'Imani', has been shoot and is in post-production.

Needless to mention is the multiplying effect of the Maisha Film Lab network. After working on the East African Mnet television series, I was able to network with a reknown Kenyan actor from the show and get into a co-producing collaboration under which we are currently working on a Uganda-Kenya television drama series whose shooting kicks off on the 3rd November.

In the same way I have networked with the production manager of the same show and got into a co-producing collaboration under which we are currently working on an East African television drama series embracing not just Uganda, Kenyan and Tanzania, but Rwanda and Burudi as well.

Worth mentioning is the multiple benefits in networking with other art-forms other than film. Besides film, I am also a professional storyteller. This year 2009, I was invited for the Sigana International Storytelling Festival in Nairobi, Kenya, and a number of friends I worked with on the Mnet television drama 'The Agency' came to support me and watched the show. When the actor I was already collaborating with on the TV drama series discovered I am a storyteller too, he confessed he's a guitarist. So, right now we are also working on a collaborative storytelling performance with a guitar and some unique African instruments accompaniments.

Above all for me probably is the fact that Maisha Film Lab has given me a sense of film-identity. I have a film-family that I belong to and can call on for a hand, even though not financial, but in terms of sharing ideas, scripts' critique, etc., anytime I am in need.

The biggest question though is (and I am sure I am not the only one asking this): after Maisha then what? People ask me everyday why I am not making any films especially after the Maisha Film Lab training and I answer: being a Maisha alumnus has messed me up. Or should I say messed up my money making avenues! I guess you are all curious how? Well, I learnt so much during Maisha that I cannot go back to the old unprofessional ways. Yet the kind of money available, even with all the low cost improvisation styles I learnt from the Lab, cannot make a film the Maisha professional way.

There are film sets that have relatively much more money that I have, where I have been invited to work, but I turned down the offer because of their unprofessional ways of doing things, which I feel would take me back to pre-Maisha Film Lab days, resulting in a quality I wouldn't want my image to be attached to. Actually I feel more at home in Kenya because of the level of professionalism, than I do at home in Uganda. I know the urge to work in a professional way and produce quality work should be a good thing, but in my context it's also a real dilemma because that means I am not working yet I have bills to pay. The way out is to make my own films but I don't have the kind of money to pull it off. International film funds exist but they are too hard to access, especially so if the project is not attached to a production house. So at the end of the day, I feel I have all these filmmaking skills but I can hardly put them into use. If Maisha Film Lab had an Alumni Film Fund, its contribution to the film industry in Uganda and East Africa in general would be much more tangible. Right now I feel like I am a part of the cream of filmmakers in the country, yet we are not making any films because of funding challenges. I am pretty sure all Maisha Film Lab alumni are struggling with the same dilemma, as we share our experiences in our day to day interactions.

## **(14) More than just a dead old tradition**

*Author* : Judith Adong

*Activity*: PACSEA Project funded by SIDA

*Story collected by*: Claudia Fontes

*Date and place*: 21 October 2009, Kampala, Uganda

I would like to share my experience in storytelling which is another cultural activity that I have been actively involved in. My storytelling career started accidentally when I went to carry out a research on how drama was being used for psycho-social support of the former child-soldiers in Gulu, Northern Uganda for my M.A thesis. Unable to reach the children, I tried out storytelling. It worked like magic. Through storytelling the children gained confidence in me and started to open up, telling me their horrifying experiences in captivity.

In 2007, I was selected to represent Uganda for the Performing Arts Corporation between Sweden and East Africa (PACSEA Project) funded by Sida. This was a corporation in which storytelling was one of the unique art-forms embraced. Under this corporation in May 2007 eight storytellers from Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and Ethiopia were invited by our Swedish counterparts for a storytelling festival in Gothenburg where we met up with six storytellers from Sweden and Norway and had a fest of storytelling. Later we proceeded to the Seventh Swedish Biennial International Theatre Festivals. Since then, even with the dissolution of PACSEA, I have continued to perform individually but we have continued to perform as a team under a different forum. I performed during the KWETU International Cultural Festival, at the Amakula Kampala International film festival, at the East African International Theatre Festival in Ethiopia, during Femrite Weeks, in schools, during birthdays etc. I have received overwhelming invites to perform that I have had to turn down several, including The 2nd Pan African International Cultural Festival that took place in July 2009 in Algiers.

PACSEA revolutionized storytelling not just as a respected art-form but also as a career that puts bread unto my table. I have even received interest of collaborations with a number of Ugandan musicians; a music-storytelling performance. Unfortunately due to my busy schedule I have not been able to follow up on any but it's something I will definitely be following up on whether in the near or far away future. Storytelling has also widened my network and family in the performing arts in Uganda, East Africa, Canada and the Scandinavia where I was able to meet storytellers from Norway and Denmark as well. No word is appropriate to describe the beauty in this diversity.

All the different storytelling activities eventually gave birth to the first ever East African international storytelling festival -Sigana International Storytelling Festival 2009- also set to be a yearly event. During the 1st Sigana International Storytelling Festival in Nairobi in July 2009, together with my fellow storytellers from Kenya, Sweden and Canada I had the most influential performance to students from different high schools in Nairobi. At Alliance Girls School, I performed to 800 girls screaming in the hall-AMAZING! After the show a number of girls reached to get some souvenirs from me and had endless questions about the art of storytelling. It was a rewarding feeling to have these young people beginning to look at storytelling as an art-form and not just a dead old tradition through which the old generation past values unto the younger generation.

Witnessing the power of storytelling on the young generation, the programs director at Aga Khan University in Nairobi invited us, the storytellers, for a planning session on incorporating storytelling into their pedagogical methods and other activities of the Aga Khan University. Right now, together with my artist colleagues from House of Talent (HOT), a performing-arts cultural group I belong to, we are trying to borrow from the discussions we had with Agha Khan University about storytelling as a pedagogical method to collaborate with schools to use storytelling to teach history, C.R.E, Literature, English and many other subjects.

For me, Maisha Film Lab and PACSEA Project have had such marked influences on my filmmaking and storytelling career in unmeasurable tones. Perhaps more than anything else I have mentioned, is their impact in changing family and friends' attitudes towards the performing arts. When I joined the University to study Music, Dance and Drama the people around me wondered what was wrong with me. They wondered why I had enrolled for 'Musiru Dala Dala' ('Very Stupid') as the abbreviation MDD was derogatorily referred to by many in the local language, Luganda. I was asked all sorts of satirical questions: 'whom will you be dancing for?' 'Will you dance during my graduation?' 'Do you really want to be dancing before politicians?', etc. This was the simplistic way my family and friends viewed my career journey. But three years later I was all over places outside Uganda and they were puzzled.

Before I left for Sweden my uncle asked me 'do you mean you are going the whole way to Sweden just to tell these common bonfire stories we used to tell each other?'

Right now as I write, my family and friends are strong advocates of studying Music, Dance and Drama. In my high school, you will find newspaper cuttings of my filmmaking and storytelling profiles on the notice board as well as the headmistress' office. And just before she reported back to school for her last O level school-term this year, my niece wrote me a beautiful letter telling and thanking me for influencing her life so positively. 'I

have learnt so much from you, Auntie' she said. 'I have performed before all kinds of audiences and gained huge confidence. You have helped me literally to break my talents open out of my shells. My friends and classmates tell me everyday-you are going to be just like your Auntie.' Imagine how many more talents are locked up in shells waiting to be broken open!

## **(15) A stake in the future**

*Author* : Godfrey Mubuuke

*Activity*: Training at Maisha Film Lab

*Story collected by*: Claudia Fontes

*Date and place*: 21 October 2009, Kampala, Uganda

I'm a journalist by profession. I've been practicing doing TV, camera, news-gathering, but when I went to Maisha I trained in sound-production for a TV movie. What I got in Maisha was, first and foremost, inspiration from Musarait [Musarait Kashmiri, program director of Maisha] who has a unique way of approaching a work environment. She is so strict, that if you are supposed to be in a certain area at a certain time, and she will always be the first person there. And this is not what I was used to. I was used to get an assignment and do it at my pace. But when I went to Maisha, I started appreciating the way of being self-conscious about other people in terms of time management. And this has really impacted me in the way I do my work now, that I no longer wait for people to ring the bell for me, but I try to be time-conscious and think that I rather wait for other people than they wait for me. That's why even this morning I was here before other people were. That has really touched me and it has even helped me in the way I do my work.

The other thing I got in Maisha was that I started appreciating movie sound. Formerly I was this person who used to love TV, I wanted to watch TV all the time, but I had never been critical about the sound. That training sharpened my ear and appreciation for movie sound: the different intonations, the way people talk, how it propels the movie to move to a certain level. Later on I even learnt from that appreciation, I wrote a treatment, 'Getting There', that I submitted to Maisha this year. I was taken on as a documentary director, and the treatment I submitted was funded and we shot that movie this year, just about three weeks ago, a short documentary. So that is basically the pay-off from having been a Maisha alumni.

At first, I felt a 'nobody', I was ordinary. But you find that you can write something, when you write something and you see sense in it, to me that was very important. I saw myself getting to a certain level that I can be appreciated by somebody who has done some work, like the mentors we had, and to me that is more than fulfilling. It was a turning point where I started to believe that I can.

Maisha to me was an eye-opener that revealed the silent potential there is in me. It helped me to get energized and swim into enormous film ideas. Post-Maisha life is even more challenging because of the motivation to do better to be able to inspire others as a pay-off. However getting started is yet another challenge since I ponder for stories that can hit beyond our domain.

## **(16) The mango tree in Amuru**

*Author* : Godfrey Mubuuke

*Activity*: Assignment by WHO to make a documentary film on health issues in North Uganda.

*Story collected by*: Claudia Fontes

*Date and place*: 21 October 2009, Kampala, Uganda

I'm a TV journalist. I went to some place in Northern Uganda to do a certain story about the emerging health challenges for the returnees while I was working for WHO. These people had the idea to go and look at health units and see how dilapidated they are. But once there I met some of the people who had been in the [refugee] camps, returning to their former homes. I met somebody who had been in the camp for the last 22 years of the war, in a district called Amuru.

“Asneri” was above seventy year old, living with a wife who is crippled. During the course of the war she fell on a log while she was running as the rebels [Lords Resistance Army (LRA)] came to attack their camp, and got one of her limbs dislocated. She never got to hospital because by then hospitals were not nearby, and if anything you could not access them. So this lady did not get a chance to repair her fracture and she’s a cripple now and crawls.

Now this family has left the main displaced people’s camp after 23 years to return home to literally start life from scratch. These people returned to their former home, but what you could see, literally, is they are just beginning life, you know, somebody who is about 80, but beginning life. I got in the place, their former home; the only thing telling you that this place used to be somebody’s home was just a mango tree; you could tell by its age that this tree has been here for some time. For the rest, these people are sleeping out, they have no house and sleeping is done at a bonfire as guarding is done in turns.

This elderly guy had about seven children, but only one or two are still alive. They are guarding a grandchild who has epilepsy. I decided to hire a vehicle and go back to this family and stayed there up to past midnight, up to about one, because I wanted to get the feel of these people, how they survive in the night, and get a few clips here and there. I incorporated this aspect into the health issues that the WHO guys were looking for, they felt my piece was good and they took it on. That was the most interesting bit of it, that you are assigned to do something different, but then you find something in the field that strikes you, and you end up selling it to the people who have contracted you to do something different, you incorporate it into the work and they appreciate it. This was basically a side-dish to me, I wanted to use it as an entry point into this kind of war, from that approach on that family, but I ended up changing the WHO’s guys point of view.

It was very meaningful to me because I found people who have suffered and you can’t do much to change their lives, but to put their story across, so that maybe the people in authority or those who have the might or the capacity to help, can help them.

I know later on the WHO made a follow-up, and I’m sure they have helped that man, at least to a certain level. I’m also intending to go back myself because I want to do something different about him, to prepare his story in a more compelling way, in the form of a movie. I want to pitch camp there, and look at them from dawn to dusk.

I want to document their plight in a film to raise funds to build them a house. I have talked to some Maisha alumni who have expressed willingness to support this cause and we shall get there, not for money, purely free.

So many people have talked about the Northern Ugandan war and people returning, and they focus in that they now that they go back home, it’s safe. But apart from the security aspect, how are the people who are in their late years going to survive? Because they are beginning life afresh. So I want to bring that out as a salient issue that needs to be looked at, at different fora for decision-making.

## **(17) People in the film and video production business contact me seeking to hire my skills.**

*Author* : Abubaker Muwonge

*Activity*: Training and networks supplied by Maisha Film Lab

*Story collected by*: Claudia Fontes

*Date and place*: October/November 2009, by e-mail

My name is Abubaker Muwonge. I am a Ugandan living in Kampala. I am a video journalist working with NTV Uganda. I am also a freelance director of Photography. I have worked on several documentary projects.

It is important first to know the education system of Uganda to understand the importance of Maisha Film Lab. I spent 16 years in school. Unfortunately the education system does not favor students who major in arts. Most of what is taught in class is not applicable in day-to-day life. For example they taught us about fishing in Canada, forestry in British Columbia in America, the history of Europe, about Napoleon Bonaparte. There is nowhere you can apply such things in Uganda.

At the University I graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Mass Communication. I majored in Radio and TV/ Film production. Unfortunately, after three years spent at the University during the course, we, the students of TV/Film, graduated when we were half-baked. There were no practical lessons. We did not have a chance to practice lighting, editing, camera work. We did not have a semi-professional camera. As an aspiring Cinematographer/ Director of Photography, this was very bad. After the University, many TV/Film students were having no skills to be proud of. Employers ended up giving us very little money due to that.

I got a chance to attend the Maisha Film Lab in 2008. I applied for the Lab to get Cinematography/ Director of Photography skills. They gave us totally free hands on training. They accommodated us in the hotel, fed us free of charge. Such training is not anywhere else in Uganda. In this country we have no film schools. I got cinematography skills, which I apply to date and I am paid good money for these skills. Others learnt sound recording, directing producing, screen-writing.

We were taught by experienced filmmakers from Hollywood, India and Europe. They have been in the industry for long and made films themselves, unlike in Uganda where lecturers are not experienced in their fields. They become lecturers immediately after excelling in their particular degree courses. Now we were learning from the masters.

Maisha gives its Alumni filmmaking equipment at a cheap rate. Actually they were giving free of charge to its alumni video cameras, sound recording gadgets and lighting kits plus editing booths. Some abused the offer, so they started to charge a reasonable fee to maintain the equipment.

Maisha helped me and other technical film crew to discover our potentials in Uganda. It is also telling filmmakers that such a potential exists in this country. Mira Nair, Maisha's founder, wants to open a film school in Uganda. I wish it happens so that aspiring filmmakers get the opportunity to learn the motion picture business as soon as possible at a young age. That chance is not here in Uganda at the moment.

Out of all these changes, the most significant for me is to experience an increase in the number of people in the film and video production business who contact me seeking to hire my skills, and the widened network this gives me.

Through its labs and workshops, Maisha brings in touch technical teams with filmmakers, thus developing the Industry in East Africa. Before I joined Maisha I did not have much contacts. Maisha's management has marketed me among video producers and filmmakers in Uganda and abroad. I was directly given job opportunities by Maisha to shoot footage for Aljazeera. More recently, Heidi Schlatter, a veteran video editor based in New York, contacted me to be her director of photography for a documentary she was shooting in Uganda. I was paid good money.

## FEMRITE

### **(18) I let my inner goddess out**

*Author* : Beverley Nambozo Nsengiyunva

*Activity* : Member of Femrite since 2000, benefited from the networks that Femrite provides to women writers.

*Story collected by*: David Kaiza

*Date and place*: 21 October 2009 | Kampala

I joined Uganda Women Writers' Association (FEMRITE) as a member in the year 2000 and met the formidable Ugandan women writers who at that time, made me quake in my shoes: Goretti Kyomuhendo, whose book, *The First Daughter*, I had read; Susan Kiguli (now Dr.), whose poetry flows from her blood; Mary Karooro Okurut, fondly called Mother Hen; Ayeta Wangusa, who I had heard read from her novel earlier; Violet Barungi, author of the popular *Cassandra*.

Goretti Kyomuhendo, the then coordinator of FEMRITE was at the forefront of Ugandan literature and often allowed me to tag along with her at various events. Some of these were public readings at the residence of the American Ambassador, British Council, dinners with diplomats and high profile events at Alliance Française de Kampala. Through networking, my inner goddess began to grow and glow. I met so many writers on both the local and international scene and I was also nominated by FEMRITE on two occasions to attend two big literature festivals in Kenya in 2006.

It was at the first East Africa literary festival that I had a chance to read my poetry. Those close to me know that erotic form of poetry is my first passion and I have a large collection. There are several conservative sections of some societies that do not perceive this poetry too well. However, when I recited this poetry at that festival, I received such a huge welcome and the director of Kwani? Mr. Binyavanga Wainaina wanted to publish it in the Kwani? literary journal. So many people present at that festival approached me and I spent the evening distributing the collection to many people.

Later that same year, I was picked to attend the Summer Literary Festival which was held in Nairobi and Lamu. This time, faculty from America read my poetry and for the first time, I was proud that my voice in erotic poetry was being accepted largely. Through networking again, my erotic poetry received further acceptance in Drumvoices Revue, a publication of Southern Illinois University. I was published alongside some of the greatest poets of our time like Maya Angelou, Quincy Troupe and Susan Kiguli. Through networking, my confidence as an erotic poetic writer has grown. Through networking, I have opened up the space for other erotic poets in Uganda as well.

## **(19) I Brought Underground Poetry to the Limelight**

*Author* : Beverley Nambozo Nsengiyunva

*Activity* : own initiative to start a poetry award.

*Story collected by*: David Kaiza

*Date and place*: 21 October 2009 | Kampala

In 2008, I started the first ever poetry awards for Ugandan women and named it after myself, Beverley Nambozo Poetry Award. Having myself no single book out and not having won a significant literary award, the risk was huge, but worth it. I had often heard of poetry as a dying art in Uganda, was tired of the marginalisation of women and decided that if no one would do anything about it, then I would. Being a risk-taker and a big dreamer, I sent out the call for submissions to various list servers, attended literary discussions, used a few posters and also websites. The award money was quite small but all I needed was for women to write. My target was Ugandan women, not yet established as poets between 20 and 40 years. They could submit up to three poems.

From December 2008 to March 2009, I received up to 60 submissions. The award began to grow much bigger than my original intention. Looking around, I selected two judges who I knew would be fair in their judgement. After their gruelling task, they presented me with the results after which I sought out an external evaluator to go through the shortlist. In an amazing turn of events all the judges agreed on the poem of the first choice called Soft Tonight, by Lillian Aujo Akampurira.

I decided to hold the award giving ceremony in August of 2009 and since it was the first of its kind, it had to be big. I realized that the award was actually growing tentacles and many people had picked interest. Several media houses approached me about the idea and I had started to receive wide coverage on radio, television and print media. I was changing into a voice for young women poets of Uganda and this exhilarated me because my dream was coming to pass.

It was a challenging time though convincing corporate organizations to sponsor a poetry event and the first of its kind at that. I received the invitation cards two weeks prior to the event as well. Even selecting the guest of honour was tough. My first choice sent a regret letter the week before the ceremony and so I approached Rt. Hon. Rebecca Kadaga, the Deputy Speaker of Parliament of Uganda. Within two days, her office called to accept the invitation. That moment was the turning point for me during the whole process. At that moment that I received that call, my heart almost leapt out of my body out of sheer joy and mad

happiness. My feet grew wings and for a few hours, my head was bobbing up and down on the clouds. The Parliament of Uganda had just endorsed poetry in the country.

On the award day, it rained quite heavily but poetry won the battle and it cleared for the evening. I received over 150 guests. Being as professional as I could, I gave everyone an evaluation form and 100% agreed that the award was an excellent idea and should continue. The Deputy Speaker spoke such incredible words and I could hardly keep in my seat. She said that of all the invitations she had received, she knew that the poetry award was the most important to attend and that the awards should be on the national calendar of Uganda. She also encouraged organizations to support such events which contribute to education and development of the country. The poetry awards received very wide media coverage after that and I was also nominated for the August 2009 Arts Press Association (APA) Awards for revitalizing poetry in the country. These changes are important because poetry, my passion, has been brought to the limelight and many poets have been encouraged to write more.

## **(20) Growing in Writing**

*Author* : Beatrice Lamwaka

*Activity*: Training activities at Femrite since 1999

*Story collected by*: David Kaiza

*Date and place*: 21 October 2009 | Kampala

When I joined FEMRITE in 1999, I came in with handwritten stories and dreams of becoming a great writer, and no writing or publishing experience. Most of the books that I had read were written by white people and the ones that were written by Africans, like Chinua Achebe, were out of reach for me. As a member of FEMRITE, I read works by most of the Ugandan writers and was able to meet them at different intervals – this was very exciting. FEMRITE welcomed me, and through a series of writers workshops with different international established writers, like Taban Lo' liong, Okey Ndibe, Tayari Jones, Ama Ata Aidoo, and John Ruganda, I have networked with both established and upcoming writers.

Early in 2009, during a writers workshop facilitated by Tayari Jones, she emphasised that it's not a publisher who makes one a writer but one's personal initiative. Although I have a published children novel and various short stories, I have never considered myself a writer. Most people would categorize a writer either as journalist or as a writer who has achieved as much as Chinua Achebe, a category I don't belong to. So when I used to introduce myself to people, most times I simply used to tell them that I write short stories and I was working on my first novel. After that workshop, I confidently started introducing myself as a writer and I didn't care how the recipient reacted. This has motivated me to write more and to find international opportunities for publication. I have short stories that will be published in the US and UK later this year.

Further on, I attended a writer's residency in Switzerland that Tayari Jones attended as well, and I continued to write more and look for publishers. I'm not depressed when I get a rejection letter because I'm a writer and it's not the work of the publisher to kill my spirit.

I have learnt to appreciate writing, networking with writers, confidently read my work in public, how to have my stories published in different anthologies, journals and magazines. I'm sure now that I will become the writer that I have dreamt of becoming.

## **(21) Kampala Writing/Book Club**

*Author* : Beatrice Lamwaka

*Activity*: self- initiative to start the Kampala writing/book club

*Story collected by*: David Kaiza

*Date and place*: 21 October 2009 | Kampala

As a writer, I yearned for a group of people to share my love for books and wanted to discuss books that they have read; I enjoyed particularly books written by Africans or books about Africa. I floated the idea to

FEMRITE members and they bought it, but I didn't want the number to be limited to FEMRITE members so I sent the call to different list-servers.

At first loads of people responded but they fell out because Saturday, when we would discuss the books, wasn't 'a good day' for them. The first group of around three people met in June 2008 to discuss *Beasts of No Nation* by Uzodinma Iweala. I worried that Ugandans didn't want to read a book and discuss, but the number increased as we met the next month. There are now about ten passionate members including expatriates working within Uganda. We have created a bond of friendship and we discuss the books in a relaxed environment and fun way.

As members of the book club we realized that since most of us were writers, we could also discuss our unpublished work. My first short story to be discussed was *The Star in my Camp*, which got shortlisted for PEN/Studzinski Literary award in 2009. Extracts from my novel have also been discussed at the club.

The club motivates me to write and at least read one book a month. I spend two of my Saturdays in the month doing what I love to do: discussing African literature. I'm sure that 20 years from now, a great novel would have been written, discussed and developed from the writing club.

## **(22) I learnt to appreciate poetry**

*Author* : Nakizanse Joy Segawa

*Activity*: Femrite's Writer's Club since 2007.

*Story collected by*: Claudia Fontes

*Date and place*: 21 October 2009, Kampala, Uganda

I joined FEMRITE reader's writers club in 2007. I learned about it from Hilda [Hilda Twongyeirwe, the co-ordinator of FEMRITE] when I went to their office asking about their publications. She told me about their Monday evening meeting. I accepted the invitation and joined the club the next Monday. On Mondays, members submit their work and we discuss it by positively and negatively criticising each other's work mainly for the purpose of making it better and correcting whatever mistake. Since that day I never missed out on any free Monday evening especially when I am in Kampala.

The most important positive change for me since I joined the club is that I started appreciating poetry. Before I hated poetry and never even gave myself a chance to read any given piece without being forced to; never in my wildest dreams did I fantasize of being a poet. I was only forced to read poems in my high school days because it was a sub-subject of literature, which I loved so much because I loved reading novels and dreamed of being a novelist.

Since most of the pieces discussed in the club are poems, I believe that helped me to become accustomed to the routine. The more pieces we discussed the different interpretations they evoked from different club-readers, [the more] it helped to groom my perception of poetry, acceptance and love and respect for those who write it.

Because of the club I was also tempted to write a piece the same year, which did not have a good reception. This did not stop me from trying again and again. I continued writing and submitting to the club and my work continued improving thanks to the criticisms I learnt from.

In 2008 I submitted two poems to the *Painted Voices* volume, which got published. Now I continue to write and read poetry in and out of the club.

One negative change I would tell you is that I think I am getting much drown into poetry than novels, which scares me knowing that my childhood dream has always been to become a novelist and still is to be more of a novelist than a poet. Yet whenever I get a pen I find myself writing more and more poems but I believe I can work on it and hope to have a book published in the future.

## **(23) Stories are being told**

*Author* : Iga Zinunula

*Activity*: FEMRITE readers/writers club ; FEMRITE's Painted Voices

*Story collected by*: Claudia Fontes and David Kaiza

*Date and place*: 21 October 2009 | Kampala, Uganda

Uganda somehow has this dubious reputation loosely hanging around it as a country where people do not read or write. It is not uncommon to hear people referring to Uganda as a "literary" desert – because there are not nearly enough writers sprouting there or books rolling off the press. To some extent this is true; most books read by young and old in Uganda are written by authors from abroad about foreign topics or about Ugandan things but through foreign eyes. If you look around in East Africa, we probably publish the lowest number of books in the region. We probably have the smallest collections of books. There is simply not enough being published, the stories are not been told.

Against this background, the most significant change that I have noticed and experienced in the last few years is the ever-increasing level of reading and writing fostered by Femrite. I feel Femrite is kind of washing away the reputation that we had as a country for not reading, for not writing.

Being published in Uganda is not easy. With Femrite, while it is set out to look at female writers, ultimately more books are getting on the shelves and more people is getting to read. Now, through Femrite: one, you can get published; two, you get encouraged to create; and three, you get to involve more people.

Though Femrite is a women's club, their Monday evening Readers/Writers Club is open to men. The club has consistently sat for years now, members criticize each other's works and support each other to the level that some of the members have gone on to become international prize winners. It is a place where you feel a lot of honesty from colleagues, a lot of thought and yet a lot of spontaneity as well.

I am by description a professional scientist really, but I always had an interest in the arts and Femrite for me is one avenue to get people to appreciate the arts. The Femrite readers/writers club has stayed on for years now. It is probably the most regular activity that I get involved with. I have gotten to appreciate writing a lot more, I have gotten to believe in myself as a writer.

Every so often I submit my poems to the Readers/Writers club and they are discussed and compared. At the end of the day I came to believe that actually what I write is not simply for me, but that is good enough for other people as well. This is significant for me, to bring up that confidence in myself as a writer, and I see it happens to me but also to other people who come to the club.

Recently I was told that I should make a particular effort to publish and I was hesitant, but through Femrite I got to meet Helen Moffet, an editor from South Africa, and she has published a collection of poems that I've read, they are so full of personal emotion, I would say. One of the criticisms I had as a writer is that I am very much in my writing. Now, she is very much in her writing too! I exchanged e-mails with her and I feel so encouraged to come out. So right now my collection is 72 pieces that add together and should be published anytime soon. I feel that if I weren't at the Readers/Writer club in FEMRITE, I probably would have not gotten to this stage as I have now, within this time, maybe it would have happened later.

In Femrite I got to interact with more people and I ended up in a situation where my feelings were validated.

One thing I longed for was to have an exhibition where you got a poem running here and next to it a piece of art, probably linked or not. I always felt that the arts should come together. I brought the idea to the readers/writers club and before you know it, FEMRITE readers/writers club actually today have what we call Painted Voices.

Painted Voices is a collection of poems also delivered in painting. So you get either poetry pieces on one page, and the interpretation of the fine artist piece in the next page, or you get the poem on the background of the fine artist's interpretation, for instance. They are such beautiful creations. It is going around schools in Uganda promoting appreciation of poetry and fine art among young people, but also among their teachers. To see that come out, to see the number of schools involved in the Painted Voices, already this year in its second edition, that was very important for me. It meant that, yes, arts can work together, yes, they can be delivered together, and it meant that, yes, things get done, and that more young people are going to appreciate art.

The young people also try their hand at writing a poem, and some of that work spontaneously done by the young students in secondary schools could end up also being published in Painted Voices. To see these kids kind of come up and produce works and write so well spontaneously, a lot of the time with their own feelings, which they are often criticized for, that is very significant for me. It makes me feel that Yes, it can be done. This is what I always get from FEMRITE: It can be done.

To have my poems published in Painted Voices for me personally is a chance to feel that my feelings are not for me only. To have my feelings, my creation out there being appreciated and even being delivered by another artist, it makes me believe that this whole stigma that we are not reading, we are not writing, we are not working, this whole idea that to be published is not easy, it come be overcome. This thing that 'oh you scribble' or 'poetry is hard' or 'it's for people only of a certain category', that easily can go away.

I can feel that more people is reaching me and I am reaching more people.

## GODOWN ARTS CENTRE (Kenya)

### (24) I'm going to perform, and I'll earn my money out of it.

*Author* : Julius Lugaaya

*Activity*: Theater Factory stand-up comedy.

Story collected by: Claudia Fontes

*Date and place*: 21 October 2009 | Kampala, Uganda

I work with a theatre company called Theatre Factory. Seven years ago I met a colleague of mine called Phillip Luswata. We used to meet many times on the bus going to Nairobi, or on the plane while going to attend a workshop or a seminar. We had worked together in some art forums. One time we met and we said 'why don't we create something weird in this country?'. Then he told me 'I have this idea, I'm thinking of doing a comedy show with some stand-up guys, what do you think?' I said 'I don't know what I think, but if you have this idea, who is going to do it and where are you going to do it, and for which people?' The space at the National Theatre was difficult to get, the charges are just too much, the bureaucracy, the papers to fill. So we opted to go into a small bar called TLC. The manager said 'I can't have you guys, I don't understand what you are saying, can it work here?', because he had never seen it. So we went to another bar, they gave us a date and we went to do the show. That day there were six guys in the bar and there was an open hour; beer was half-price, but we still had six people in the audience: the owner of the bar, the wife, the waiters, and the girl who was looking after the pool table. We started the 45-minute show, it ended, and the manager said 'guys, go away, I can't afford you, go somewhere else, just go!'. He gave us a meal, we had chips and chicken, we had a chat, and he said 'guys, I don't ever want to see you again, go'. So we left.

We said 'what next?', 'we must keep working, keep working'. At that time Philip was lecturing at the university in music, dance and drama. He identified a few kids who he thought would buy the idea and then we started the journey. As we speak today, the Theater Factory is one thing that you cannot miss to watch, every Thursday here at the National Theatre and also on television.

We wanted to encourage students from music, dance and drama, [make them realize] that they can be featured, that just like other students who look out for loan funds, who look out to other big institutions, they also could have a future. In the beginning many people from MDD (Music, Dance, Drama) at Makerere used to work for TASO. TASO is an NGO looking after people with HIV. Nobody wanted to work there because there was this phobia that if you worked there you would get sick. But students from MDD used to go and work there because they didn't care, they were going through a lot of challenges anyway.

As I speak today, we work with 11 students from Makerere University who have graduated and specialized in Music, Dance and Drama, which is really a good thing. And we have generated a certain standard of payment for them, we are creating a certain style, they can wake up from their beds now and say 'I'm going

to act today, and then I'll earn my money at the end of the month', so we are in that kind of journey, which I believe is good to share with other people to see, to hear and to comment.

If you look at the so-called stars or celebrities of the past, our first people used to stand out in the arts. They were very poor people, they were not celebrated like today. That's one thing that kept pushing us to work hard, because we didn't want to be like those people. We wanted to create a change for other people to come and enjoy, though it wasn't easy to create that change. Though we are still in the middle of that change, as it is not yet fully complete, at least there's a good sign of a different life.

We have created a certain standard; we have a team of 16 actors. Every Monday each individual is supposed to bring two stories. There is no 'boring' or 'good' story. We don't care, just as long as you can bring two stories every Monday. And then every week we have what we call the director of the week, he's responsible for whatever happens that week. That person is going to write those two stories in a book, so Monday is the day for collecting stories. Then Tuesday is the day when we choose which stories will pass, every week we do 13 stories. On Tuesday and Wednesday we rehearse the stories. Wednesday we decide which stories will work on Thursday. [We have a strict] discipline: one, if you don't come on Monday, then don't come; everybody knows that. Two, when you bring two stories you get paid for those two stories at the end of the month. Three, we meet at 3 pm every time; if you come 30 minutes late we penalize you, there is a fee for that. So we are just creating discipline and teamwork.

Each person has a chance, because the director of the week is in charge of the week, he will note the time you arrive, he will note the stories you've brought, and he will direct the stories and decide who does what. So you are in charge, there is that bit of being responsible.

You need to be there to see how this magic works, because we looked back and our ancient groups used to be run by particular individuals: the founder of the group is the cashier, the timekeeper, the writer, everything. But we wanted all individuals to feel the hot seat. We've developed that kind of scenario, so everybody enjoys it but also feels the value of his/her time and his/her story.

We believe there is a lot of talent; there are people who are born to perform, and there are those who are trained to perform. But the challenge we have in this country is that when they introduced this form of art [stand-up comedy] in this country, I think that's where it went wrong. Because today, if you got a boy from Senior 6 and threw him to Makerere [University], and told him to choose which faculty he would like to study in, I am sure, if he went through those buildings, how nice they look, nobody would point him to MDD. Our parents in this country believe in four courses: their children must become a lawyer, a doctor, a surveyor, or an engineer. We lose a lot of talent because of this believe. Some of us, we were resisted to do what we are doing today, our parents had kind of given up on us.

We have a history of not paying people in the arts, because you find that most people are never paid but they still come to work. I used to work in this theater production. If you look at the value I'd put in for half a year and the money I got, it's hard to explain that's how much I was paid. We used to rehearse from 8pm up to 3 o'clock in the night for 3 months, and then perform in the theater on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays for 3 months. I was paid 94,000 shillings [34 euros] for all those 6 months. We have a record of not paying people. We make the money and we come up with so many long stories not to pay. Which is not good, and that's why people don't believe in the arts. That perception is part of the things we wanted to change.

## MUSIC MAYDAY TANZANIA

### **(25) From theory into practice**

*Author* : Susanne Mbise

*Activity*: Show Me (Y)our World Project, a competition organised by Music MayDay at The University of Dar es Salaam- Institute of Journalism & Mass Communication.

*Story collected by*: Claudia Fontes

*Date and place*: October/November 2009 | by e-mail

I've had many a great chances to participate in the Music MayDay's activities for the past two to three years. During this time I have been in several of its activities directly and indirectly. Here is just a glimpse at my great pleasures and some pressures with the major projects I've been involved with.

I first came to know Music MayDay through a competition they held at our University (The University of Dar es Salaam- Institute of Journalism & Mass Communication, now School of Journalism & Mass Communication) in the year 2007. They were looking for four students from our University who would participate in the Show Me (Y)our World Project together with other youths from the Nether Lands. Even being in my first year, I was among the lucky four. We spent two weeks making a documentary in Tanzania and another two weeks in the Netherlands.

All in all, this single chance has opened a lot of doors for my career. Having pursued my degree in Bachelor of Arts in Public Relations and Advertising I was able to get a field placement with one of the legendary Production Companies in Tanzania, Tripod Media Co. Ltd. The Managing Director of the company noted me in the competition and when I applied for a field placement I was immediately admitted.

More over, I have managed to acquire a network with the participants in the project and since then we have been keeping intouch and have developed a beneficial relationship in our field of practice.

How ever the most important benefit I got was the experience of practicing what I was studying (mostly in theory) at the University. I even got a chance not only to learn that in our home environment but also in a foreign environment. I experienced the excitement and challenges of video production in a way that most students don't get a chance to. In turn, I continued pursuing TV Production and Production management at the University and now that I have completed my degree programme, I have been retained as program producer and presenter for the University's Media. (Mlimani Radio and Mlimani TV)

This year again (2009), in May I also participated in another project where this time I was with a different group and we met other students from Fonty's University, who were also studying on Journalism. This was the most challenging of all projects I had been to. This is because the project was too complex for the little time it was given hence there was a lot of running around and last minutes. Also the arrangement wasn't very convenient for both parties. Even so, I learnt to work under pressure as well as to be pro-active as a journalist. It was pretty challenging at first but again the teacher from the Dutch group managed to help us a lot in managing our chores as individual journalists but still stay as a team and plan as a team. I even went on an emergency news-reporting in Mbagala during the bomb blasts, that was a first time for me and I managed to learn a lot on such situations.

Most of the things we learn in class is theory and books-related. Learning from a real situation is a rare experience. In my case, the day the blasts occurred I realized the Importance of grasping an opportunity and how sharp a journalist should be ready to sacrifice a lot to get clear, accurate information for the people. To start with, my own family was against me going and I had a clash with my sister when I insisted I was going because she thought it was too dangerous. It was a shock when I got to the location and saw how tragic it was and especially how it felt when asking for information from victims of a tragedy. The Dutch student and teacher I went with seemed more experienced and sharp and I tried my best to step in their pace. They had already called their radio station and did a live program.

All in all, I learnt how effective a journalist can be when certain aspects processes are shortened. In our media houses we have too many processes going by the book and we forget the main objective, which is delivering accurate, precise and timely information to the people.

I believe that this project can change to a great extent the future of Video Production in Tanzania, especially since it has now been one of the current hot self-employing fields for most youth. Yet, I believe a lot of talents are going to waste since there's no sense of professionalism in what they do and hence they can no explore the extent of their great potentiality and that of the market. Universities and colleges are hard and expensive to get enrolled therefore Music Mayday provides the few chances most of the youth may have to make it well in this field.

The movie industry is growing at a very fast pace but unfortunately it is too commercialized that the artistic point of it is being ignored. Documentary filming is also catching up because more and more companies and organizations have realized the importance of visual aids/tools. This applies to visual adverts and such used social institutions and commercial agencies. In this aspect video production is a much demanded profession needing professionals. That is why the companies that can afford out-sourcing to international production

companies do so, because Tanzania still hasn't been able to produce well recognized professionals and the few that are there are not that known.

## **(26) I am a part of a process of transformation**

*Author* : Ashura Kayupayupa

*Activity*: Music Mayday Tanzania training and networks Peace Caravan, organised by Norwegian Church Aid-Tanzania, World Religion for Peace and other partner organizations.

*Story collected by*: Claudia Fontes

*Date and place*: October/November 2009 I by e-mail

I am Ashura Kayupayupa, 24 years old. I joined Music Mayday Tanzania in 2006 when I met Miss. Victoria Kimaro who was working with MMTZ at that time. She introduced to me Music May Day TZ and how is working with young people to bring about changes to young people's life.

Since I joined Music Mayday Tanzania I have experienced some positive changes in my life. Before I didn't have much a spirit of volunteering, but after I joined MMTZ I have been able to volunteer in B-Connected events which are organized by MMTZ yearly and get connected to some other organizations to volunteer for, to mention a few;

-June 2007 volunteering for 2 days in the Makutano Fair (Art and Craft Exhibition) Organized by Mawazo Gallery

-May 2008 volunteering for 2 days in the Makutano Fair (Art and Craft Exhibition) Organized by Mawazo Gallery

In the beginning I could not get used to meeting lots of people and make some friends or exchanging ideas with them. But Music MayDay Tanzania, dear participants and the rest helped me get lots of things from that. I really understood how life becomes meaningful and colorful when you think deeply and widely and share them with people who understand you.

In additional, it was a pleasure for me to attend for the training course in Music MayDay about Website Designing in Dar es Salaam on 13rd October to 21st November 2008.

I would like to thank Jackline Mgumia, Francis Moris and the rest of the organisers to have me in the website designing course. Special thanks to trainer who run the sessions and made me explore and find out some good things about Website designing.

Music Mayday-Tanzania (MMTZ) has changed my life by building capacity session they offer, now I understand various social issues and also helped me get interacts with other people/organization and working with them for the purpose of transforming youth life into skilled and experienced life.

In September-November 2007 I was able to participate for 16 days in the course (T.O.T) of the PEACE MAKER-Program on Life skills, Civic Education, Entrepreneurship skills and VICOBA (Village Community Bank). After training 'Peace caravan' start from Dar es salaam to Mbulu, visited 7 regions of Tanzania and 11 districts to rise awareness on reduction of poverty and understanding social rights as citizens of Tanzania. 2007 Peace Caravan was organized by Norwegian Church Aid-Tanzania, World Religion for Peace and other partner organizations.

Peace Caravan real changed my life on how I understand about social issues like poverty, social stratification and marginalization of resources that are facing my country.

Now I feel I am a part of the process to transform all these form of exploitation and discrimination and bring about social justice and better life to all citizens, it is possible if we utilize the resources we have effectively.

## **(27) Learning from one another**

*Author* : Ashura Kayupayupa

*Activity*: Training of Trainers (T.O.T) Workshop on Ethics Education through Interfaith Learning organized by GNRC in New Delhi, India, 2007.

*Story collected by*: Claudia Fontes

*Date and place*: October/November 2009 | by e-mail

Before joining Music Mayday Tanzania I worked with Global Network of Religion for Children (GNRC-Africa), an organization working for the wellbeing of children. In April, 2007 I was able to participate for 5 days in the Training of Trainers (T.O.T) Workshop on Ethics Education through Interfaith Learning organized by GNRC in New Delhi-India.

One day we had an evening of culture, whereby young people from fourteen regions were exchanging their cultures and learn from one another. From that night I learnt they are some people so attached to their culture like Indians and Arabia, which includes food, dressing and language. They are proud of their kind of food, the way they dress since they are young and their language. Unlike to some African, which seem to abandon our beautiful culture and try to embraces those culture from the west countries. I learnt to be natural, simple and African I do like my African status especially being Tanzanian.

In 2009 I was in Uganda for Youth Peace Planning training, therefore we had a day for cultural activity. I was impressed by the culture of Luganda people by the way of their dressing especially for women who use to wear long gown decorated with a wide ribbon at the womb. They real look nice and present their culture effectively but also I liked their kind of food especially grind banana it is so delicious.

Talking of language it is good thing to have your own language as identity of culture but sometimes it has negative effect especially in uniting the nation for development. For example in Uganda they speak different seventh language which, means the language of the town is not the same of the rural area.

Tanzania is lucky to have single national language which is spoken by one hundred and twenty tribes which Tanzania has. Tanzania has twenty-seven regions but still people can communicate by one language for the development of the country, stability and good socialization.

## **KILIMANJARO FILM INSTITUTE**

## **(28) On top of Africa's roof**

*Author* : Glory Mollel

*Activity*: Training as a camera lady at Kilimanjaro Film Institute.

*Story collected by*: Claudia Fontes

*Date and place*: October/November 2009 | by e-mail

*"Preserve your culture, do not be changed by the new world"*. This is the idiom where the Maasai elders use to tell their people. Maasai is the most famous tribe in Africa for preserving their culture like foods, clothes, dances, and taboos and its where I came from.

Since I was young I was taught how to preserve my culture and I always try to keep it. I was taught not to have any say in front of men, not to eat in front of men, not to choose the lover (husband), men are the one with the last say.

When I got my secondary education, I faced a new world of freedom that I should stand by my own.

The most positive change, which I got in my life time is getting the idea of being a filmmaker. This is so meaningfull to me, it was my dream and through film I can reveal the underground people's ideas open to the world.

When I came to my film school KFI (Kilimanjaro Film Institute) and get the life skills lesson, I recognise that I have the right to speak, to eat and I can choose the man I want to live with. I am the final desider of my life.

I am now married to a completelly different tribe man although it has broght a big conflict between me and my family. But according to my assartiveness they came and realise that women has to be free especially in choosing their loved ones. This is the positive significant change to me since I am free now I have no that much mental slavery.

Normally women in our country (TANZANIA) do not take camera operating course by thinking that is the work for men. But I am changed I am the camera lady. KFI is giving equal chances to man and women and I can now do what men's are doing in the field. We Maasai are very fermous in making jewelery so I have transfered the creativity from jewelery making to film making. This is so meaningfull to me because my work requires creativity most of time.

Being a camera lady or a female filmmaker you meet a lot of challanges ether positives and negatives like, stresses and insultation because we meet a lot of people with different behaviours especially in the field but KFI has given us a lesson of life skills and now I am flexible I can change according to the situation, enviroment and circustances.

The most significant [challenge] I got from being a camera operator is climbing Mt Kilimanjaro, the highest mountain in Africa and the free standing in the world. It was so meaningfull to me since women in Africa do not climb Mount Kilimanjaro due to the difficulties in attitude but I made to the top of roof of Africa.

[The negative aspect of this change is that] before I was wearing my tradition clothes and I was not allowed to wear clothes such as, trousers etc. But now I can wearing trousers due to the descipline I took (camera-lady). Because realistically I can not go to work with my tradition clothes. So this one big change I have noticed since I joined Kilimanjaro Film Institute. However, the world has changed and we should look for the right cultural activities to preserve and those which oppreses people should be changed in a moderate way.

KFI has made me to met a lot of friends from different places and now I can exchange the ideas with different people in the world so I have a lot a friends; this make me to be proud of KFI. KFI has uplifted me from one place to another and it has made me to fullfill my goal although not yet.