

Arts education in Kenya: Public and Private Sector Initiatives

Emily Achieng' Akuno
Centre for Creative and Cultural Industries
The Kenya Polytechnic University College
Nairobi, Kenya



Abstract

- Learning of and through the arts:
 - Public sector – Government initiatives
 - School curriculum – African, Western, Oriental; varied levels of access and participation; Nursery to University: music, dance, drama, film, elocution
 - KMF and KNDF – annual, ministry of education;
 - Talent Academy – currently with UNICEF support
 - Private Sector- non-government initiatives
 - Church-based choral and drama festivals;
 - Training and workshops by arts-oriented trusts and NGOs e.g. Kwani?, GoDown, Theatre Academy, Ghetto Classics...
 - Arts-oriented initiatives for skills and community dev.



Arts Education

- Education in the arts in Kenya, a multi-ethnic, multi-racial context, is a culturally rewarding and challenging engagement;
- Education in the arts works in Kenya because it:
 - Accommodates learners from various cultures;
 - Exposes learners to artistic expressions of various cultures;
 - Validates individual cultural artistic expressions



2 stories

- There are initiatives that encourage education in the arts, where cultural diversity is at its highest level of influence to learners' benefit. The two that stand out and selected for this presentation are:
 - The Kenya Music Festival – a state promoted annual school-based co-curricular activity that runs between the months of May and August throughout the nation;
 - The Ghetto Classics, a small, focused skills and personal development programme based at Korogocho, a large informal settlement area of Northern Nairobi, bringing together two neighbouring primary schools and a church.



The Kenya Music Festival - KMF

- From inception in 1927, intended as an educational tool;
- Positions itself as a source of quality music, dance and elocution, hence an environment for the experience and assimilation of the same;
- Aims (Musungu, 2012)
 - To provide forum for talent exposure, cultural interaction;
 - To promote opportunities for career dev.
 - Initially to expose Africans to Western music



KMF

- Impact:

- Development of music literacy for participating teachers;
- Access to higher education as result of additional skills;
- Exposure of children to music of cultures other than their own;
- Several youth moved into music as result of participation;
- Some of the teachers in our school system owe their musical growth to KMF;
- Some of the popular /gospel musicians are products of KMF
- Some of the artists in the laugh industry, drama and elocution performers owe their talents to KMF (Musungu, 2012)



Ghetto Classics

- An initiative of Art of Music, organised by Elizabeth Njoroge, a pharmacist turned music-entrepreneur;
- Located in Korogocho – a low-income section of the city;
- Relies heavily on donor assistance and youth goodwill;
- Two programmes:
 - School music learning – in two neighbouring primary schools, and a club for those interested - in a nearby church;
 - A brass band made up of youth from the region, with donated instruments , with volunteer mentors being ex-Nairobi School students who played in the school band in their days.



THE PARADE



Never too late to start lessons



COOL (Photos courtesy Liz Njoroge)



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Impact

- Accommodation
 - The KMF trainers' workshop - where the essence of various artistic and cultural expressions is explored. Many educators encounter new music styles and cultural flavours at this workshop;
 - KMF syllabus provisions: entries divided into 'classes' – stylistic categories based on cultural groupings, which recognise the indigenous and recent communities in the country. (Excerpt – Asiayia; Dodo);
 - Ghetto Classics: both western and African music practices;
 - Participation in unfamiliar music despite background;



Impact...

- Exposure
 - Learners can be limited in their cultural experiences to their geographic settings;
 - The arts, as expression of culture, are our ways of experiencing our environments;
 - Participation at KMF enables learners from 40+ indigenous and 10+ resident communities to experience each other's cultural expressions;
 - New sound structures, new musical ideas, new cultural concepts
 - Curiosity, interest developed, models to inspire
 - Assimilation of new concepts



Impact...

- Validation:
 - The time when I wondered if indigenous music was 'good enough to come to school' (Akuno, 1997) is long gone;
 - Research focused on exploration of indigenous music and its application for knowledge transfer (Mbeche, 2010; Otoyo, 2010; Mushira, 2010; Andang'o, 2009); Reciprocated in other art forms.
 - Concepts, learning procedures, underpinning developmental principles, skills, learning material etc have been derived from the music and add value to education;
 - Indigenous art forms are validated as they are employed in/for education ;
 - The diversity of cultures ensures the arts are suitable for enhancing, propagating and conserving culture, key goals in education.



Conclusion

- The arts, for many, remain:
 - The most enjoyable avenue of education;
 - The only means of cultural education
 - Viable avenues for creating national cohesion due to the necessity for learners to step into roles of members of other communities, thereby seeing things through others' eyes.
- The stated initiatives play a vital role in enhancing participation in the arts, thereby assisting in the delivery of learning through the arts in a culturally diverse yet enriching environment.



THANK YOU

