

# 2018 AFRICA MONTH EVENTS REPORT

CENTRE FOR INDIGENOUS INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC AND DANCE OF AFRICA

## A COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE: INDIGENOUS STORYTELLING FOR CULTURAL ARTS EDUCATION

The role of indigenous storytelling in society is often overlooked. This year's Africa Month celebration uniquely considered bringing a new interest on how communities could be revived to revalue the knowledge and wisdom contained in storytelling



Dr Sonkanise kaNkosi

towards community development. Because Universities seek to integrate academic experience with social reality, young students, particularly those involved in arts cultural education studies, do need to be exposed to multiple opportunities to partake in meaningful outreach activities. In

association with Funda Community Arts Centre, the Department of Education Centre for Indigenous Instrumental Music and Dance for Africa (CIIMDA) led by Dr Sonkanise kaNkosi, organised the 2018 Africa Month events to focus on the important role of indigenous African storytelling.

The week-long events were graced by the presence of an invited IsiXhosa Storyteller-Researcher, Ms Nompucuko Zakaza- PhD student from Rhodes University and Eastern Cape Provincial Support Coordinator for Nal'ibali Reading for Enjoyment Campaign.

Her role was to host talks and do live demonstrations of how she uses IsiXhosa storytelling for community mobilisation and children's education. Armed with just her hands and the gift of orality, she worked with a group of 30 children from the Funda Community



*Honoring legends  
through grassroots  
community cultural  
arts education*



*Inspiring children to  
become responsive  
and responsible  
towards preservation  
of African indigenous  
cultural knowledge,  
wisdom and*

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College Library Reading Club which is managed by Simangaliso Sibiyi and Nonkululeko Ndabezitha, who also happened to be working closely with Nal'ibali Literacy Mentors from Soweto. For the first time, these children received not just a story but a full workshop on the significance of indigenous storytelling in community and education. Furthermore, they were given opportunity to re-invent and integrate ordinary folktales into other arts genres. This resulted into children's oral, writing and creative skills being harnessed through the natural wisdom of storytelling. What was different about this experience as well was that the medium of isiXhosa language was used to inspire children of different language backgrounds to partake in the activities with pride. Language was not a barrier at all



### Storytelling for Children

After the session at Funda Community College, the visiting storyteller-researcher was invited to conduct storytelling sessions at the University of Johannesburg

Campus Funda Ujabule Primary School. This is where the language issue was clearly viewed as less of a problem when it comes to storytelling for children. Two classrooms were prepared for storytelling sessions, one being called a proper isiXhosa and the other a dominantly SeSotho class. The storyteller was not bothered with language shift, she skillfully narrated *intsomi kaLovane* (Chameleon's folktale) from one of Mama Gcina Mhlophe's collections in her own language for both groups. Children responded very positively throughout the sessions. What made this experience unique for the children is that it was full of fun and enjoyment. There was integration of rhymes, songs and dance, which made children to have fun together with their educators while they could also recall the animals and events from the folktale with very clear minds. When asked by Dr Nkosi on how these children manage to follow a language which they are not taught in class, Ms Zakaza humorously responded by saying, "Storytelling knows no language. It is the relationship between the storyteller and her audience that creates powerful imagination and lasting involvement in the story." Storytelling aids fun in learning.

An unhappy child grasps nothing and eventually dislikes reading or even answering simple questions in class. Educators involved in this exercise were simple left with a homework to continue taking storytelling as a special way of creating an enabling environment to teaching and learning, a specific role in their departmental quality management standards. It also reminded them of their duty to exploit readily available stories from their own languages, which are universally available from elders and children themselves. Understandable so, society has evolved; we have modern grandmothers who cannot even recall a single folktale from their past.



Moreover, technological advances like television and cellphone games or what's up take up a lot of time which families could utilise to enhance cultural moral communication with youth and children. In the olden days, grandmothers told us about *amazim*, *izigebenga*, *amagongqongqo*, not because they ever saw any

like *Nomahamle*- but because of the voice of education

which reminds children about imminent dangers of life.

### Life Line Peer Educators as Storytellers

The final session for the visiting storyteller -researcher was at Funda Community College once more, but with a totally different audience. Simangaliso has a training and development relationship with Life Line. This is part of his mandate to infuse indigenous arts education to community youth, adults and children. As an arts curator, he said, "It does not help to look for solutions elsewhere, when we can still look within ourselves and discover ways of contributing to resolving our day to day social problems. I would like our reading club children, our partner youth and adults at the centre, to realise that by bringing you here, I am opening a gateway for the real Soweto to come out and shape our future." To this effect, Simangaliso and Dr Nkosi had organized a workshop for 40 Peer

Educators who are in a special project by the Department of Basic Education and Life Line. This was a group of young men and women, with a few adults, which displayed different emotions towards this call for a 'petty *intsomi*' workshop. Some were even looking very perturbed by such a waste of their time. Skillfully taking them through a journey back to their childhood, the facilitator-storyteller could change their mindsets within a few minutes. On asked on why they though indigenous storytelling was worth being afforded a platform in contemporary health education spaces, most them agreed that they are working with young minds which are very sensitive and particularly their role required them to have skills to deal with children suffering health

problems which cannot be dealt with anyhow. Passion for children and arts skills were cited as very useful attributes to enable children regain confidence in themselves. It was surprising to end up with a series of stories from different languages which the peer educators recalled from their childhood and re-imagined for health education purposes. Stories were written, discussed and dramatized in front of the class. Some peer educators confessed that this exercise assisted them to overcome their personal weaknesses like being shy, not understanding how to be equal to children when you work with them, use of voice, tone and gestures which help to make children at ease and many more.



*Youth in Community requires meaningful skills development on the role of indigenous cultural education in society.*

The role of women storytellers in society was also emphasized through their voices and visibility in the Africa Month celebration events. This is the role, from grassroots of our society to contemporary platforms, which needs to be afforded opportunity to thrive towards recognition and nation building.



*"When women storytellers, poets, writers and publishers unite towards a common cause"*

When Artists unite towards a common cause; that of Revisiting and Decolonising African Languages and Genealogy, Africa will continue to be proud of its writers, poets, storytellers, musicians, curators, actors, percussionists and all! Attending the NWASA conference organised by Dr Lance Nawa also served as a reminder for writers and publishers to "take to pen and paper for meaningful preservation of the African languages."

Lastly, Tlale Makhene (CIIMDA drumming instructor) performed with the University of Johannesburg Vocal Jazz Ensemble (from SWC) at the launching of the UJ Arts and Culture Jazz Weekend (Arts Centre, APK). Sonkanise ka Nkosi, Kgomotso Le roux and Sifiso Bogale (CIIMDA Musical Arts Ensemble) sealed the Africa Month week-long events with the African vibes at the UJenius 2018 event (Sanlam Auditorium, APK).



*Let the African cultural spirit prevail till we meet in the 2019 Africa Month Celebrations!*

Video links: CIIMDA Musical Arts Ensemble Performance

<https://www.facebook.com/100003360871310/videos/pcb.1627296720725675/1627290040726343/?type=3&theater>

<https://www.facebook.com/100003360871310/videos/pcb.1627296720725675/1627290257392988/?type=3&theater>



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