



YOLÉ! AFRICA

'Let war be our problem and peace be our emblem'

Yolé! Africa is a center for art creativity and cultural exchange based in Goma, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. Its mission is to promote peace through art and culture. It offers to the communities and the youth a place where they can develop their artistic skills and actively participate in the peace and reconciliation process of their region.

Regular activities 2010 - 2011

"The name Yolé!Africa comes from the cry "yolé!" used by the shepherds in Central Africa to gather their herd. "

I. Organization Introduction

Yolé!Africa (Y!A) is a cultural center serving the youth in Goma that promotes peace through art, music, dance, and film. Through training and workshops in professional artistic skills and community events organized by youth, Yolé!Africa equips young artists in eastern Congo with the tools to convey their message and take their talent to a higher level. Through debate and reflection on current social and political issues, Y!A promotes dialogue and respect and aims to foster the mentality that everyone is an actor of his/her life and of the society in which he/she lives and has the right and duty to make it a better place to live.

Yolé!Africa is a non-political and non-denominational organisation. Through its programs, Y!A promotes and encourages respect for all human beings and fights all forms of exploitation or violation of human rights.

All programs are based on the principal of community involvement. These activities bring the community together and create debate and dialogue. They aim at raising awareness and educating communities about social and political issues (human rights, peaceful coexistence, HIV/AIDS, gender based violence, civic rights and duties, etc.).

Through film, music, dance, and radio programs, Y!A gives "a voice to the voiceless" and promotes the reality and the views of people who can't express themselves because they lack access to communication means.



Activities such as public debates, concerts, performances, screenings, and art exhibitions are organized to bring people together beyond their origins and their personal history and to create a place where fair and sincere dialogue can take place among members.

Yolé!Africa believes that the success of its mission goes through a particular welcome given to young people coming from poor and underprivileged environment. Indeed these young people are particularly vulnerable and are a key element of the building of a united and peaceful community. Y!A offers them a protected place and integrates them into the activities in order to help to restore a constructive living environment and social ties and strengthen their capacities. It is important in a region where years of destructive conflict have impeded the development and education of many children and youth.

Brief History and Governance

2000 : Yolé!Africa was founded in Kampala, Uganda, by a group of Congolese artists and a Dutch anthropologist to bring support through culture and art to young refugees from Central Africa and from the Horn of Africa who had fled to Uganda.

2000 – 2004: The organisation establishes a reputation both regionally and internationally as a centre of cultural exchanges and place of artistic creation.

2004: With Congolese founders, Y!A opens a centre in Goma, the capital of North Kivu province, Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, while the region undergoes armed conflict.

2006-2009: Y!A decreases activities in Kampala and builds up the centre in Goma due to the ongoing conflict in North Kivu and the lack of opportunities for youth.

II. Regional Context

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a country of fertile land, natural resources, and breathtaking beauty, has been plagued by colonization and war since 1884, when the Congo was given to King Leopold II of Belgium as his personal property at the Berlin Conference. On June 30, 1960, Congo gained independence from Belgium and was governed by the first democratically elected Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba. Lumumba was assassinated six months later, in January 1961 and was replaced by the Mobutu Sese Seko regime, which plundered the continent until 1996 and is written in history as one of the world's most despotic rules. Today, DRC ranks as one of the poorest countries in the world, the 167th country out of 177 according to UNDP development indicators.

Since 1994, the DRC and in particular the eastern region, has suffered armed conflict both by national and international groups. During the Rwandan civil war in 1994, the DRC received millions of Rwandan refugees and still suffers today as a result of both Rwandan armed groups and Congolese national militias. In January 2008, a peace agreement was signed in Goma, the capital of North Kivu, bringing together more than 20 armed groups in the region and integrating them into the national army. Insecurity has significantly diminished in North Kivu, but there are still patches of armed conflict in rural areas.

Despite this context, DRC is currently in a transition of great significance. June 30, 2010, marks 50 years of independence. The first democratic elections since 1960 took place in 2006 and were closely monitored by the international community. National elections are slated for 2011.

Peace in DRC will affect the entire region of central and east Africa. Author Franz Fanon says, "Africa is shaped like a revolver and Congo is the trigger." The health of Congo's democracy and the strength of its civil society not only determine the well-being of its own citizens, but also the well-being of neighbouring countries.

Without continuing push from Congolese civil society for transparent government reform, engagement of women and youth in the political space, and basic human and legal rights education for uninformed populations, Congo is on a dangerous brink of remaining a state that is incapable to provide basic services to its citizens and one that solely represents an elite minority.

In this regard, Yolé!Africa aims at using art and media for a twofold purpose: to increase the capacity of civil society, the youth, and activists to disseminate their message effectively and professionally with the largest impact possible and to create dialogue and discussion rising from critical thinking that leads to political activism and citizen engagement in building democracy at the local level.

III. Programs

A. Music and Dance

Yolé!Africa is a haven to every young musician and dancer in Goma. The Y!A cultural centre serves as a rehearsal space every day of the week from morning until night. More than 100 youth pass through the centre each day. Y!A offers rehearsal space, a recording studio, sound equipment, and music for young artists. Trainings in sound equipment, recording equipment, and organizing public cultural events are offered for all youth interested.



Every Saturday there is a 'jam session' that takes place at the Y!A centre attracting 400-500 youth each week. A committee of musicians organizes the jam session and plans which groups will perform. This gives musician and dancers a regular place to present and improve their performance skills. It also attracts other kids to Y!A and gives them the hope that they can perform on stage as well. Most importantly, with the

mentorship of Y!A staff, the performances are organized by the youth and they take ownership over its implementation.

Y!A has three dance programs: a professional dance company, training and rehearsals for youth dance groups, and a dance program for kids under 10 years old, many who live on the street. The professional contemporary dance company, Y! Dance, has performed across Africa and Europe. More than 25 youth dance groups associate themselves with Y!A and use the centre's space for rehearsals and receive technical instruction from Y!A staff and volunteers. The dance program for kids was formed after the youth dance groups realized that there were always young kids watching

them, but the kids never had a chance to practice or perform. The program is led by the youth dance groups with oversight from Y!A staff.

B. Film and Mobile Cinema

Yolé Africa is the leader in making cinema accessible to communities in North Kivu through two main initiatives: Salaam Kivu International Film Festival and mobile cinema. Y!A also works closely with Alkebu Film Productions to produce short films, both fiction and non-fiction, which are shown both locally and internationally.

SKIFF lasts ten days and is packed with film screenings followed by discussions, video workshops, concerts and dance shows. A theme related to current events in the region is chosen each year, which serves as a guideline for the ten days. In 2009, the theme was “Art as a tool for social change.” Many of the films, discussions, and workshop topics focused on how the youth and the community can use art, music, and dance, to encourage social cohesion and to bring together different groups to work for peace. The underlining theme addressed was what practical actions the artistic community can take in order to foster actual positive change in the broader community. More than 9,000 people attended SKIFF in 2009. SKIFF 2010 will take place in October and the theme is, “To Size the Future, Reflecting on 50 years of Independence.”



The mobile cinema project makes socially conscious

films accessible to the whole community. Y!A partners with Search for Common Ground to show a film regarding sexual violence in DRC and war zones and then moderates community discussion and debate following the film. Y!A also travels throughout the province showing films produced by African filmmakers in public places to raise consciousness regarding human rights issues and the role communities need to play in peacemaking.

C. Film Instruction

One of the largest obstacles to the use of films to promote peace, denounce human rights abuses, and instigate civic engagement in local politics is the lack of access to technical and artistic trainings. For this reason, the program, Alternative to TV (ALT2TV) aims at creating affordable opportunities for training and skills development to youth, activists, and civil society leaders who have some experience in film and would like to use film for community education and activism. Training in the basics of filmmaking will place the participants at the forefront of their field and equip them with a more effective and impactful vehicle of communication.

Public film screenings are held in addition to a select number of short films broadcast on national television, as Y!A has a partnership with RTNC and Digital Congo, two of the national TV stations.

ALT2TV enables people who have the potential to strengthen local democratic institutions to express their message articulately and engage the broader community in dialogue surrounding the issues presented both through community discussions and debates following public film screenings as well as discussion time on national television. This means of public expression is crucial approaching the 2011 elections and in educating the community about local governance structures that have a direct impact on their daily lives.



D. Painting and Contemporary Art

Y!A offers a free painting and drawing classes for children in the neighbourhood surrounding the centre. The goal of the program is to integrate children coming from different social classes and tribes and to give them another way to express themselves as many have traumatic experiences due to war and loss of family.

Y!A also provides a local artists with a market to sell their work. As a cultural center, Y!A receives many visitors and features local artists work for sale.

E. Reading



There is no library in Goma and books are extremely limited. Schools often have books that are outdated by decades and teachers instruct from their old notes that they received in school. The education system in Congo is dismal and students are not encouraged to be creative or ‘think outside of the box.’ Y!A has a collection of books on cinema, music, and

art and offers reading sessions for anyone who is interested. Culture clubs from primary and secondary schools come each afternoon and read at the centre and Y!A staff are available for instruction and insight.

F. Baraza

Each week a debate is organised for the communities at Yolé!Africa centre about a specific social or political issue. The debate is introduced and moderated by one of the cultural animators of Yolé!Africa. Everybody is welcome and the focus is set on an open dialogue, where everybody's opinion is valued. The goal is to promote constructive discussion and show that it is possible to have disagreements without demeaning another person or group. Baraza also helps participants to think analytically about issues facing the community and encourages creative solutions.

G. Professional Development and Partnerships

Yolé!Africa is fully aware that the problems encountered in Congo cannot be solved by a sole organisation. The solution will be found by putting the ideas and strengths together throughout the whole Great Lakes region. For this reason, Y!A constantly strives to build partnerships with organisations or individuals pursuing the same goals in order to create a network of people working together to build a better world.

These partnerships also give Y!A artists an opportunity to connect with other networks and perform outside of Goma and likewise partners come to Goma to perform. This type of exchange is paramount in building artistic professional capacity in the region. It is based on a creative exchange between young people and professionals, between Congolese artists and activists as well as those coming from different countries. It not only gives artists an opportunity to develop their technical skills but also opens their eyes to other experiences outside of Congo.

IV. Plans for the Future of Yolé!Africa

Yolé!Africa has met increasing demands to organise more activities and to open the running activities to a wider audience. The centre is completely at capacity every single day and the space has become insufficient for the demand. In order to continue to invest in the community, Y!A would like to move to a larger centre and create two sub centres. Through this initiative, Y!A can make its activities more accessible to different communities in Goma as well as transfer capacity to youth to supervise the centre with mentorship from Y!A personnel.

In order to ensure success of the two sub centres, Y!A will first identify in each of the two areas of Goma a focal point person who could represent Y!A and implement step by step cultural and artistic activities in his/her context. Once these focal points have been identified they will spend one month with the cultural animators of Y!A to get to know the organisation and its activities. To ensure the quality and the accuracy of the activities, Y!A plans also to build the capacity and train the focal points in cultural animation. The sub centres will carry out jam sessions, art classes, and mobile cinema screenings each week and once a month all of the sub centres and the main Y!A cultural centre will host an event together.

The main Y!A cultural centre needs to move to a larger space in order to accommodate all the needs for rehearsals, performances, and recording space. There

are clearly financial limitations and Y!A needs additional funding in order to move to and develop the new centre. There is also a large need for additional music and sound equipment, books, films, and camera in order to meet all the demands for these materials from the youth.

