

Culture and Creativity as Vectors of Development

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Zanzibar is a group of islands off the coast of mainland Tanzania, 6 degrees south of the Equator. Zanzibar has been attracting explorers, traders, visitors and settlers for centuries and their legacy has inevitably influenced the islands' language, religion, architecture, cuisine, music and cultural traditions.

Zanzibar is home to a healthy abundance of cultures: African, Arabian, Persian, Indian and European; coexisting, with distinct identities and traditions still very much in evidence. Zanzibar is perhaps most famous for its Stone Town; a labyrinth of alleyways connecting houses, shops, bazaars, mosques, schools, temples and cathedrals. The island also hosts clove plantations, spice farms and some of the finest beaches and diving locations in the world.

When I first arrived in Zanzibar in 1998, there existed little awareness and no infrastructure for organising international events. Few Africans were using email, so we were mostly relying on the postal service. There was no sound, lighting or projection equipment on the island and we had to import technical equipment from the mainland. And really worrying, back then, eleven years ago, I was surprised and disappointed to see there was little appreciation from local people for the wonderful orchestral taarab and other local styles of traditional music and dance that had been beginning to disappear.

We clearly had a long way to go to build and develop local people's event-management skills. More seriously, we faced the greater challenge in building local people's awareness and appreciation of African music, whilst competing against American *gangsta rap*, MTV and Europop to put African music back on the map. After helping establish Zanzibar International Film Festival and the Dhow Countries Music Academy, in 2003 we set up an NGO with main aims to promote the wealth and diversity of music from East Africa, to develop skills in the music sector and to build partnerships through cultural networks.

Our main event each year is the **Sauti za Busara** music festival. Sauti za Busara in Swahili means Sounds of Wisdom. It's a popular festival bringing people together in celebration of music from East Africa and beyond. The event attracts audiences from all walks of life, of all ages and backgrounds. Over six days, around 18,000 people attend, of which around half are from Zanzibar, 30% from across mainland Africa and 20% from Europe, North America, Middle East and Japan.

The festival is centred for four days in Stone Town's historic Old Fort, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and continues for another two days in different locations around the island. Keeping the event accessible for local people is a priority, so admission is free for everyone until sunset. After then, daily tickets for Tanzanians cost around 60 cents - or 10 euro for international visitors.

More than forty groups (four hundred plus musicians) participate in the festival each year, of which 75% are from East Africa and 25% from other parts of the Continent and African

diaspora. Upcoming as well as established groups are showcased; acoustic and electric; from the cities, shanty towns and villages.

Artistic and technical workshops are an important part of the festival, aimed for musicians, media professionals, arts managers, technicians and cultural workers from the region. These workshops aim to build knowledge and skills for the long-term cultural benefit of the region. During February 2009 for example, the festival provided training workshops for twelve young people from Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, in stage lighting and sound engineering.

Sauti za Busara has evolved over the years, bringing in more 'international' acts, but retaining its essentially local flavour. It provides a platform for local musicians to experience music from other parts of the world, whilst introducing East African music to the visitors. In any society this kind of interchange is vital to the health and development of musical styles.

The festival brings a big boost for the local economy. Government statistics show the number of visitors to Zanzibar in February has increased by more than 400% since 2003.

Festivals bring people together in celebration and unity, regardless of their political and religious differences. Such opportunities are rare in East Africa, and these events play an essential role in maintaining peace and stability, through building intercultural respect and understanding. Furthermore, in Zanzibar, more and more local people of all ages are now finding ways to earn a creative living throughout the year, in the fields of music and the arts.

We do of course face many challenges organizing the festival, not least in fundraising, sourcing quality technical equipment, training and capacity-building for local staff and catering to the needs of more and more visitors. One critical factor for our success, we believe, is that the festival is a shared experience between visitors and locals. Local people are more confident in their culture and the fact that it must be special, because visitors come from all over the world to see it. International visitors know they are experiencing something authentic and unique, as they enjoy African music under African skies, shoulder to shoulder with African people.

Finally, I think it's important to mention that these festival visitors spend their money in ways that have more impact on ordinary people. From hotels and restaurant workers to drivers, fishermen, market traders, artists and sellers of handicrafts; cultural tourists are boosting the grassroots economy in Zanzibar far more than the all-inclusive package tourists who pay their holidays upfront in Europe and spend their time next to the swimming pools and bars of the island's beach resorts.

Sauti za Busara festival provides an example of an event designed to develop, in both locals and visitors, an appreciation of the uniqueness, wealth and diversity of music from the region. It shows there is a beauty in our traditional music, with employment and income to be gained in sustaining it.

Before I disappear, let's watch a few minutes' video highlights from the sixth edition of the festival that took place around six weeks ago. Thank you for this opportunity, I'll be happy to answer questions and talk with any of you over the next day or two and please do enjoy the remainder of this conference.