

# ASSITEJ INTERNATIONAL

## UGANDA CENTRE. REGIONAL WORKSHOP

VENUE : PRIDE THEATRE

KAMPALA - UGANDA.

DATE : 24<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2002.

TIME : 9 : 00AM - 4 : 00P.M

THEME : THEATRE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE.

TOPIC : CHILDRENS' TRADITIONAL THEATRE  
AND LITERATURE.

AUTHOR /PRESENTER.

C. MAKUMBI KIZZA SSALONGO.

LECTURER : KYAMBOGO UNIVERSITY.

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## INTRODUCTION

### THE SOCIETY

In the African societies, people live in organised groups ranging from the smallest of two persons (husband and wife) to family, clan tribe, nation and Africa as a continent.

Long time ago, the children's theatre in African societies was well known as "Oral Tradition," the source of the informal education. Before the formal or modern education was introduced or modern education was introduced to the society, there was an informal education system which was mainly based on theatre i.e. "Fear" in order to achieve "Hope" the core of the child's successful future.

Theatre for children and young people include the following evidences according to age, sex, tribe, and beliefs.

AGE	AIM	THEATRE /ACTIVITY
1. Infancy	Lullaby for Listening	Expressions
2. Childhood	- Learn counting	- "Ka-nnee -mu"
	- Memory & Geography	- "Kiiso kya mbuzi"
	- Physic	- "Kibugga" Girls
	- Birds and Nature	- "Nyonyi" Girls
		"Ntuuha" Girls
	- Fruits	"Ssewajjiba" Boys
		"Aeme" - Girls
	- Sense of Rhyme	"Nzair ekyana" Girls
3. Adolescence	- Initiation	Circumcision or "Imbalu"

## ASSITEJ

ASSITEJ or Theatre for Children and young People. The children to day are youth tomorrow what about youth to day?

A community consists of three groups of persons i.e

Children

Youths and

Adults

An expected good society should be built on a strong foundation in both Physical and mentally etc starting with children. A proverb in Luganda says "Akaakyama amamera (akati) bwokagolola kamenyeka" Another proverb in Runyankore says "Akati kainikwa kakiri kabisi, ku kooma wa kainika nikahendeka".

Both proverbs refer to a young tree, you can only bend it when it is still young or soft, when it grows hard you can NOT. Trying to bend it you brake it.

## ASSITEJ

ASSITEJ unites thousands of individuals, theatres and theatre organisations, challenges creators of theatre for children and young people to strive for the highest standards; celebrates the right of all children and young people to enrichment through theatre, Promotes peace, equality, tolerance, and cultural and racial harmony, supports the development of theatre for children and young people, recognises children and young people and their capacity to contribute to the development of society, encourages the rights of children and young people to cultural experiences.

ASSITEJ is a membership based organisation.

ASSITEJ members receive access to world-wide exchange of ideas and cultural traditions, international network of professionals producing theatre for children and young people, website with up to date world-wide information, academic research materials on theatre for children and young people, festival guide of international children and young people's theatre festival, network for exchange, creation and development of theatre awards international and national meetings and workshops at affiliated festivals, conferences and seminars, International congress and world Festival of theatre for children and young people, election of national and international representatives, archives and research materials, contacts at national ASSITEJ centres around the world.

ASSITEJ is for Professional theatre companies, individuals, and organisations working in the field of the theatre for children and young people.

## INDIGENOUS PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES AND FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AMONG CHILDREN.

Traditional physical education; games and sports are all in -born among African children. Children play while grazing goat, they play while looking after cattle, they play when going to collect water, firewood, grass etc.

Children sit around fireplaces at night with their grandmothers and listen to educative stories, then act plays and games. These traditional activities help them to grow physically fit and mentally bright traditional sports and games help children to grow with acceptable manners in their society. The school of the above-mentioned activities operates according to age, sex, etc. a child in the mother's womb learns movement through feeling. The pregnant mother do grinding, dancing in rituals etc. this enables the foetus to feel the movements gradually absorb the rhythms.

Children at their early age:- Mothers, grandmothers and all other relatives sing traditional lullabies for their babies while swinging them rhythmically, upwards, sideways etc. as children develop in understanding, the standard of performing traditional physical activities like games, imitating birds, animal-characters in a form of dance develop. At a later stage, i.e between 5 years and 10 years, girls mainly continue with imitating birds' characters, an example picked from the central region of Uganda (Buganda) Girls form a circle moving around clockwise and anti-clockwise with their hand swinging up and down like birds' wings rhythmically while singing the following:

### 1. TITLE – "NYONYI" (The Bird)

**Solo**

**Chorus**

Nyonyi

Terima Muwemba

"Bird"

"Doesn't grow sorghum"

Nyonyi

Esanga Mulimire

"Bird"

"Finds it grown"

While jumping forward, they continue with the same tune but changing the chorus, adding in more names of seed or grains. (Demonstration)

In another example, girls in Lango, Northern Uganda, while expressing the sweetness of a mango fruit, gather in a suitable place in the village. They stand in a circle facing inwards, they bend forward holding their knees and rhythmically jump up and down while turning their hips left and right. They sing a song to accompany the movements. The song goes as follows:-

**2. TITLE – “AEME” (The Mango)**

Solo	Chorus
Aeme Aeme	Camo mit ...
“A mango A mango”	“Is so sweet” ...
Aeme	Camo mit
“A mango”	“Is so sweet”

They continue with the tune changing the solo parts by adding in more persons who enjoy the sweetness of the mango. (Demonstration)

**3. TITLE – “KIBUGGA” (From Buganda, Central Uganda)**

This is a girl’s traditional outdoor game for physical fitness mainly for the back. The game is traditionally done in pairs. One girl kneeling down supported on both knees and hands facing downwards, the other girl standing closely by the side of her friend. She bends forward and holds the waist of the one kneeling down with both hands. A special traditional song for this game is always led by those standing; the chorus by those kneeling down. They sing while springing on the back gently and rhythmically downwards and upwards. The tune goes as follows:

Solo	Chorus
Kibugga	Tonkutulakutula
“Name”	“Do not break me”
Kibugga	Onkutula bulungi
“Name”	“Break me well”

They go on and on changing till they stop.

**4. TITLE – “AMAGGUNJU” (From Buganda)**

These are traditional movements for boys and girls in Buganda, central Region of Uganda. The game/dance was created by the Mushroom clan members for the young King Mulondo and his age-mates in the Palace of Mengo in Buganda 1800 Century. The Mushroom clan members were known for fishing. The name of the movement

originated from the name of King Mulondo's uncle "Ggunju". The characteristics of the movements depicted the fishing activities. The movement was intended to build up the busy physically strong and normally disciplined.

A series of movements some involving stumping and kicking sideways alternatively on rhythm were choreographed. The accompaniment consists two small drums; one tuned high in pitch and another very low played with sticks mainly for the rhythm control. Special traditional songs were composed for this game/dance.

#### 5. TITLE – "NZAIRE EKYANA" (Born a Child)

This game originated in the western region and spread over all parts of Bantu speaking areas. Boys and girls stand in two lines facing each other, a soloist starts the song, others respond in the chorus. The song is always sung in a rhythm form with clapping, then after, they change from clapping to beating hand as of their paired partners; right hand with the right hand and left hand with the left hand, they sing as follows:

Solo	Chorus
Nzaire nzaire ekyana	Balinda
"I born I born a child"	Balinda is a name
<sup>na</sup> Ekya kya Ssebo kirina amaaso	Balinda
<sup>^</sup> "The child of mine has good eyes"	Balinda

They continue with the tune adding more praising words by the soloist.

#### 6. TITLE – "SSEWAJJUBA (The Dove) – Impersonated

Boys in Buganda, Central Region of Uganda graze goats. They sing and play many games while they are grazing goats. "Ssewajjuba" is one of the most popular games among all others. The literature of the song and body movements depict the characteristics of a dove. The way the game is organised; the boys of the same height stand in threes facing in the same direction, two from each group stand side by side closely, the third boy stands behind the other two. Each one of the two hold his hands with fingers across each other at the level of his hips. The third boy steps his right foot first in the hands of the boy on his right, then climb up with the left foot into the hand of the boy on his left hand while holding the shoulder of each of the two boys in front



of him. Those who climb up are the doves. The game starts with a song after all doves have climbed up. The doves start the song while the carriers respond in the chorus.

The song goes as follows:

<b>Solo</b>	<b>Chorus</b>
Ssewajjuba	Agudde
"The dove"	"Has fallen"
Mu kyokero	Ekyabayima
"In the fireplace"	"Of the Hima"

The carriers move forward rhythmically while the doves move the torso down and up rhythmically as well. This game is competitive, starting off together, who gets there first?

#### **7. TITLE – "NTUUHA –SANDAARA TURORE" (Crested crane fly we see)**

This is a girls' outdoor game from Bunyoro/Tooro in Western Region of Uganda. The song text and movement of the game originated from the characteristics of Uganda's National Bird symbol – the Crested Crane. The movements in this game imitate the Crested Crane's playing movements. The song and movements run as follows:

- i) Ntuuha – Sandaara Turore -Wawari
- ii) Obworifa Orisandaara noha - Wawari

The girls form a circle facing inwards they start singing in unison while imitating the birds' movements with their hands forming birds' wings.

## ASSITEJ UGANDA

### THEME: "Fear and Hope"

The theme is quite relevant to the African indigenous child's informal education and cultural organisation for African child's life style.

We can start from the early stage of the child while at home with parents, relatives, and neighbours to adulthood:-

1. A girl child is fears to annoy her mother. Hope to gain her mother's love care.
2. A child is made to fear sitting on his father's chair, if he does it, the father gets ill wishes which cause death! Hope: A well behaved child to parents, earns good living. A reward of "inheritance" is a great hope.
3. Girl fears pre-mature sexual practice which cause HIV/AIDS and Death!  
Hope: to live healthy and happy life to get Good marriage and bear children to live a respectful life in society.
4. Fear: Fighting whenever proved which leads to bodily injuries, imprisonment, or death!  
Hope: A voiding fights, live a happy life. All people remain friends to you.  
Always get assistance.
5. Fear: All acts of satanic which lead to breaking of God's laws.  
Hope: Is the heavenly and everlasting life.
6. Fear: An employee who fears to steal from his/her place of work i.e money, promotions as a reward of honesty.

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**THE TEXT**

Is he in there? Scene outside a door.

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Cast:

A

B

Postman.

A. Squats on the ground in front of the door. Puts an ear on the door. Listens. Nothing to hear. Again. Nothing. Puts the hands at the gap between the door and threshold B. comes.

A. (Scared, then relieved) Oh, its you!

B. Is he in there?

A. I don't know

B. Didn't you hear anything?

A. No

B. (peers through the keyhole)

A. Had a look already, too. Completely dark.

B. You have to wait till your eye got used...

A. Don't speak up!

C. ... then you can see in darkness, too He possibly sits in darkness. Well, he often does.

A. Did you see him?

B. No

A. You cant see nothing, I had a look already.

B. But I am hungry

A. You can go inside

B. Yes, I go inside and then I catch it! And you just stuff yourself in peace.

A. I don't go inside I wait till Doris comes.

B. That can take sometime in case she works overtime again.

A. Sometimes she comes back earlier.

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B. She cant help you always

A. Sure. She always helps me if possible. If she wouldn't help us anymore we just could hit the road.

B. She shouldn't have brought him with her

A. Well, she needs him. So she says.

B. When he went for me she couldn't help me either.

A. Anyway, I will wait till she comes.

B. Just listen once again! You are so good at listening. Like a rabbit.

A. (listens) He seems to sleep.

B. You hear him snoring?

A. Not if he is far in the back

B. We could sneak in and quickly grab some food. In case he is far in the back.

A. If you wake him up he is worst

B. Or just when he is worst.

A. He notices everything, even when asleep.

B. You know what would be good? If we squat here and he even is not inside. That would be ever so stupid.

A. He is simply too strong, that's it

B. I guess I go out again. We cant squat in front of this stupid door all the time, everyday. Come on, lets go out for a while.

A. You know for sure that she sill be mad at us when she comes and we are not here. And on top of that she then is furious!

B. In here it seems colder than outside! Icebox!

A. From down there comes some warm air.

B. (warms up the hands at the gap as well). Oh yes, he has it warm and rich. What a bastard!

A. Hush. Not so loud! (holds an ear at the door) I think I hear something.

B. (looks through the keyhole) Can't see nothing. You do go on! Did you hear something from inside?

A. Oh, nothing I guess.

B. Steps.

A (scared) There!! There he comes!

B. Sheer madness! We squat in front of the door – and he even is not inside!

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A and B away from the door. Squeeze themselves into a corner, frightened. Steps halt.

A (whispers) Good to be outside. If we were inside we for sure would be caught

B. Its not him coming. That wasn't him

Steps

A. Yet! Hush! He must not see us

B. When he comes he is ever so filled up. Then he doesn't see anything at all

A. But then he is especially...

The postman approaches. He rings the bell by the door. He waits. Nobody opens He lays down a small parcel outside the door and goes away.

A and B are relieved.

A. He is not in.

B. Gosh! Next time we will do it like this. Just ring the bell and wait and see if he is in

A. Unlock, I have to go to the loo

B. Cissy! (It always scares the shit out of you!)

A. I had to go all time!

B. Oh boy! I will fix myself such a sandwich!

B starts putting the key into the keyhole when the door opens. Dazzling light  
Animal's roaring.

Black.

## UGANDA NATIONAL THEATRE AND CULTURAL CENTRE AT 40 YEARS

Uganda National Theatre and Cultural Centre is a Semi-autonomous statutory body established by an act of Parliament. (Act 32 Uganda National Cultural Centre Amended in 1965). It is under the Ministry responsible for Culture which at the present is known as the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. The Minister in charge appoints a Board of Trustees who oversee the administration of the Centre/trust by drawing out relevant policies for its (UNCC) operations and survival.

The Centre now lives a history of probably over 40 years. Those who made this come true were individuals and organisations that were eagerly interested in the preservation, promotion and development of art and culture in the Country.

It was through their initiative, imagination and generous help that what we have today as a 40 year institution was realised. The list is quite long but the most prominent were:

- H.H The late Aga Khan  
P.C. G.C.S.I G.C.M.G.  
G.C.V.O. LL.D
  - The British Council
  - The Uganda society
  - Kampala/Masaka licensed  
Coffee Curing Works Association
  - Sir Andrew Cohen K.C.M.G.  
- C.V.O. O.B.E. B.A.
  - The late Muljibhai  
Madhvani, K.B.E
  - Indar Sign Gill
  - John Henderson
  - Parimal Art Academy
  - KATS
  - The Makerere players
  - Mohammed Ali J AmAl Ramji
  - The Amber players.
  - Kampala kola Kendra
- They were ably supported by indigenous drama groups who included the present African Artists Association led by Wycliffe Kiyingi and Sam Kagimu Mukasa.

The concerted effort by all these groups and individuals raised £ 40,000 which was supplemented with £ 50,000 from the central government in order to construct and complete the theatre.

It was on 18th December 1956, when the then Governor and Commander in chief of Uganda Sir Andrew Cohen K.C.V.O. O.B.E. laid the Centre's foundation stone a ritual that blessed the construction of the present National Cultural Centre.

From 1956 to 1972 most of the activities in theatre were grossly dominated by non-indigenous group and in the lead was Kampala Amateur Theatre Society. It was a hard fight to have indigenous groups in theatre. Those who participated actively in the fight were former Directors of the Centre Peter Carpenter and the late J.B. Okot P'teck.

The expulsion of Asians in 1972 by former President Idi Amin and the eventual change in the political environment gave opportunity to local groups to "occupy" the theatre.

The Centre just like any other entity in the Country has been affected in many ways by the ever changing environment. The changes have presented varied challenges and opportunities to the Centres and in the general theatre industry.

The challenges now include among others:

- Creation of a National Theatre audience
- Formulation and application of appropriate marketing techniques for the National Theatre products.
- Raising enough and appropriate trained manpower in the field of theatre.
- demphasise commercialism and instead emphasise professionalism in theatre.
- Refocus on the objectives for which the institution was established: (i.e promotion of art and culture). As a mother theatre it would help theatre industry as whole to remain focused on the main objective of theatre's industry existence.
- Raise resources to support National Theatre programmes.

#### SOME OF THE ACHIEVEMENT

- (i) Establish working relationships with other theatres e.g. Continental Theatre.
- (ii) The institution acts as a home for the artists.
  - It gives professional guidance to different artists, e.g. those who want to go for further studies, training in theatre arts-Reconciling artists who have had differences or conflicts.
- (iii) The institution has remained focused on art and Culture e.g. Privatisation has not affected it.
- (iv) All theatres that came up picked from the National Theatre.
- (v) We have been a link between Uganda and other foreign cultural organisations e.g British Council, Alliance Francaise.

(vi) Preparation and organisation of festivals.

(vii) We have managed to maintain the structure of the theatre.

It is gratifying to note that the Centre still enjoys confidence from a number of individuals and organisations. There are still contacts with some prominent organisations with whom the Centre shares its vision. A lot more is however needed to achieve what the Centre quotes as its future. The Centre looks at its future with positivity and more especially as man docks into the millenium.

The programme has been drawn out in the areas of repairs, and renovations festivals, training productions (e.g emphasis on National Theatre's productions). Marketing, organising festival e.g Kiyingi's festival, workshops and seminars etc. all geared towards the true realisation of the Centre's set objectives.

The forty years are filled with failures and successes. The analysis of the two areas is a responsibility of every one that cherishes art and culture. National Theatre comes in as one of the key facilitators and at the end of it all suggestions can be presented which in turn should be utilised in ensuing period. The next period should among other things ("see") the establishment of district cultural centres. Policies should be put in place to facilitate the actualisation and realisation of set objectives of the Centre. Theatre should move from a structural building to an idea that should be shared by every one that values life. We should consciously move into the future with a clear conception of theatre in the entirety. That way we shall have a genuine and vibrant theatre industry. Let us all refocus for better results.