

Patrick Kabanda's Visit to The Africa Education and Leadership Initiative Schools
Yei, Southern Sudan.
July 17th to July 20th, 2010

Feedback from the trip
Q & A with Patrick Kabanda
Questions: Anita Ayers Henderlight of Africa ELI

Anita A. Henderlight: *What is your perception of music in Yei? How can it be used to help our girls and communities better understand education and women's issues?*

Patrick Kabanda: First of all, thank you for giving me the opportunity to visit the Africa Education and Leadership Initiative programs in Yei. At all the schools I visited—Yei Girls, Yei Day, and Nile High—I was received with unimaginable grace. I appreciated the hospitality and the chance to learn about your work. Also, many thanks to thank Jeff Gill who apprised me about your work. If it weren't for Jeff, I would probably have followed my earlier plans to visit Valentino Achak's Marial Bai Secondary School, but I am glad I went to see your schools in Yei this time around.

The students in Yei are talented. It was encouraging to see that they make music on their own without any training. From what I saw, they already use music to communicate the challenges they face, such as the meager education for women. They just need help! And by the way, in addition to music, they are involved in drama, dance and poetry. They use all these media to express their challenges and to inspire hope.

Q: What objectives did you achieve in going to Yei? Were your expectations met?

A: I wanted to learn first hand about southern Sudan, and visiting Yei helped me get a glimpse of that region. I was wrong to assume that the entire Sudan was dry. I saw plenty of arable land. And in addition to the soil fertility, there is abundant potential to grow the education sector. The young people I met seemed extremely keen about learning. They deserve the highest quality of education to feed and sustain their hunger for learning.

Music and culture are great treasures in any society. I was hoping to hear the traditional music of the region, but I did not get that chance—the songs students performed didn't seem to represent their traditional music. It seemed to me that the region's long war may have disrupted the people's relationship to their own traditions in music, arts and crafts. Reclaiming those traditions can be an important part of healing a wounded society.

Q: What are the next steps, or a way forward, in response to your visit and assessment? Will there be a song written for our girls to perform during girl-child education day or other days of celebration? How might our girls participate in a music project?

A: There are many possibilities. First, I plan to meet with the head of school and other colleagues here at Phillips Academy (Andover) to explore ways in which Andover could

be involved with education initiatives in southern Sudan. I don't know if anything will come out of these meetings, but I will honor my obligation by delivering the message. In addition to Andover, I encourage you to learn more about other independent schools such as Phillips Exeter, St. Paul's School, and Deerfield Academy, to name a few. If there is a way you could engage with these schools that would be great. Here are links to the related websites: www.nais.org; www.aisne.org

Second, I hope there will be a chance for me to come back for a longer period to teach and learn. You can learn about my music education tour of Uganda and Kenya 10 years ago at musikaba.net/projects. Hopefully, something comparable could happen in Yei. Meanwhile, we could look into conducting music theory classes via the Internet, and also set up video conferencing talks between Yei and Andover students. Again, I don't know how far we will get in executing these ideas now, but I'm including them as possibilities to think about for the future.

Third, arts education opportunities should be provided. The students are doing the best they can under current conditions, but imagine the possibilities if they could polish their art. Unfortunately many institutions (governments and schools) often undervalue the power of the arts. There is a huge assumption that the arts are just entertainment, and it is difficult to see beyond that screen. But good leadership means navigating waters where others will not. And your program should tap into the opportunity already there to help students interested in the arts achieve their fullest potential. This can be done by lobbying for government support, introducing the arts in the curriculum, funding and promoting student productions, creating exchanges with teachers and students across Africa and abroad. All this may not happen tomorrow, but I encouraged students to start school choirs right away. And I hope that if I ever get back, I will find flourishing school choirs. Also, there is great untapped potential in recruiting elders to teach traditional stories, songs, and crafts, which could be started right away with minimal funding.

Finally, yes, it is entirely possible for the students in Yei to write a song (or songs) for celebrations such as the girl-child education day you mention. I would be delighted to arrange something for them. But in addition to performing what others have written, students should be encouraged to believe in and test their own powers to create. This would empower them as well as elevating their understanding of works they perform by others. By the way, I just got an email saying that the government of southern Sudan is looking for people to write their national anthem. The deadline is coming up soon, but imagine if students in Yei or any other young students in southern Sudan wrote this anthem?

Q: How will you be using any photos or videos that you captured during your visit? How will your material effect or affect ELI students and our organization?

A: I intend to give copies of the photos and the video footage to your organization. You can post them on your website or make post cards—use them in any way you want as long as you attribute them. I left copies of the photos with my mother in Kampala for Kenneth to pick up. I will send the digital copies of photos and the videos.

Q: *As ELI prepares for future visitors, what are your recommendations for us to ensure a successful experience?*

A: I understand that you were in a transition with one of your staff leaving for further studies, so that explains why coordinating the trip was complicated. But here we go:

i) You could provide a list of items such as: what airports to use, preferred airlines and their flight dates, approximate cost of airline ticket, visa information, exchange rates, accommodation information, and so forth. You could post this as part of the visitor and volunteer information on your website.

ii) Make an itinerary or timetable for visitors with brief information about the places they are to visit.

iii) Stand out: It's important to understand that in some places slowness in acting or responding can be interpreted as indifference. But while Africa is generally slow, people mean well. So Africa Eli's local staff could stand out by acting promptly on professional matters. As an African I believe that if we want to compete on a global scale, we must adapt to the professional practices that are expected elsewhere. And I don't mean adopting the Japanese style where being even two minutes late is unacceptable or the US northeastern "faster, let's go" attitude. I mean there is an acceptable professional pace that we tend to ignore in Africa; any organization that performs on an international scale, whether in Africa or elsewhere, can't afford to overlook the value of time.

iv) Communicate: Things don't always go as planned. But while we can't control this, we can always communicate. For example, if an event gets canceled, if the car breaks down, if one will be late, just let the visitor know as soon as possible. That way it is easier to jump on plan B or C or even D!

Q: *Generally, what is your opinion of Education in Yei? Were you surprised by anything you witnessed?*

A: There is a tremendous opportunity for education in Yei, and I applaud you for your efforts to help young people there fulfill their dreams. Now, apart from arts education, there are some other practical areas where education could be tremendously helpful to the young people of Yei. For instance, I was surprised to see that people cut trees as they wish, without concern for deforestation, and that agriculture is not a popular practice among young people. In addition to the lack of support for the arts, the other challenge will be to get young people as interested in agriculture as they are in computers. Food is expensive in Yei. Yet people still need to eat. Young people need to learn about how to take care of their environment and that they can make a good living from farming. Moreover, they need to learn how to use technology hand in hand with agriculture.

At the White House forum with Young African Leaders on August 3rd, President Obama asked, "Why shouldn't Africa be self-sustaining agriculturally?" "There's enough arable land" he added, "that if we restructure how agriculture and markets work in Africa, not only could most countries in Africa feed themselves, but they could export those crops to

help feed the world. Why not?” The meeting can be watched [here](#) or you can search for it at www.whitehouse.gov. Yei and other arable places in southern Sudan could play a big role in the agricultural sector.

Speaking of strategic thinking, I have just seen Alan Murray’s article “[The end of management](#),” that appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* online on August 21st. Here, Murray quotes Gary Hamel, whom he refers to as a leading advocate for rethinking management: ‘The single biggest reason companies fail’ says Hamel, ‘is that they overinvest in what is, as opposed to what might be.’ Analogously, right now schools—with big or small budgets—concentrate on what they see as the most immediately useful subjects like, let’s say, math. But what if they also invested in what they call non-mainstream subjects such as the arts? The arts have been proven to engender creativity, risk taking, and trust. I don’t mean to suggest that math is not important. Indeed, it is, but we ought to be asking how math could teach us about the arts as much as how the arts could teach us about math. That way, we are more likely to get students to integrate vertical and horizontal thinking. Right now, many students get an education to get a job. Fine. But the problem, as we know, is that many of them often concentrate on the same disciplines. So, ultimately finding a job becomes problematic. What if students got an education that truly focused on expanding their minds to become job creators rather than merely job seekers? With such exciting opportunities—granted that peace and stability can be sustained—southern Sudan could become a shining example of a new education model that embodies innovation, efficiency, ethics and sustainability.
