

Nina' Mba's Insider / Outsider's Account



As the United Nations year of volunteers 2001 draws to a close, this is the last of my series on volunteers in Nigeria. Today's focus is Youth Business Initiative, Nigeria (YBIN), affiliated with Youth Business International, based in the United Kingdom. It is an offshoot of the Prince's Trust, established by his Royal Highness (HRH), the Prince of Wales. The Trust, set up in the early 1980s, is designed to help disadvantaged young people to start their businesses. The concept is to mobilize local business communities who, working in partnership with local and national organizations, would provide access to finance for young people through a programme of business mentoring and the provision of seed money. Later the HRH formed the Prince of Wales International Business Leaders Forum.

SINCE my column of November 19, 2001, in which I called upon Muslim Northern Nigerian women, in particular, to protest the anti-human judgment on Safiya Husseina Tungal, I am pleased to note (Vanguard, November 19, 2001) that an NGO, Help Eliminate Loneliness and Poverty (HELP) issued a statement, signed by Mrs. Halimat Abdullahi, describing the judgment as an embarrassment to the majority of Nigerian Muslims and as against Islamic law. It concludes that Safiya's male partner in the act was discharged and acquitted for want of evidence.

"Do we now assume that she impregnated herself? This is a dangerous and encouraging signal officially given to men to take advantage of society and women. Gender discrimination of the highest order." Well-spoken, HELP.

Still, on gender discrimination and times, I wish to share with you a recent disturbing but inspiring experience. I was privileged to watch a pre-release screening of a film, "Uncut playing with Life" produced and directed by Mrs Sandra Mbanefo Obiagio of the NGO, Communicating for Change (a communications organization aimed at raising awareness of environmental and development issues to change lifestyles).

The film is about Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Nigeria, especially in Edo State, seen not through the eyes of the victims but of the traditional practitioner. The central character, Stella, a Bini circumciser, experienced a life-changing conversion when she watches the play, "Ikpiko and other inquiries after the fact" staged by Chuk Mike performance studio workshop which highlight the tragedy of FGM which leaves physical and emotional female victims. Once convinced of the

Volunteer Initiatives

evil of FGM, Stella works with an organization that educate the communities about the dangers of FGM and teach the practitioners alternative income-generating vocation. The film also documents how successful advocacy in 1990 worked with international companies on many aspects of sustainable development in their respective community. The two organizations recently set up a joint venture, Youth Business International (YBI). YBI helps businesspeople and partner organizations around the world to start up Youth Business Initiative in Prince's Trust model. It has since been able to support Youth Business Initiative

'Once convinced of the evil of FGM, Stella works with organizations which educate the communities about the dangers of FGM and teach the practitioners alternative income-generating vocations.'

in over fifteen countries, including Ghana, the Caribbean, South Africa, and India.

Early in 2000, Mrs Alero Okotie-Eboh Jadesimi came into contact with Youth Business International in London. As a former broadcaster of programmes, daughter of Nigeria's Minister of Information and Communication, she led the sensitization of legislators in the Edo State House of Assembly and to the passing of the first bill in Nigeria which proscribes FGM in 1999. Since then, I believe the Rivers State House of Assembly has also outlawed FGM.

When the film is released, I am confident that the wave of progressive enlightened change will flow through the chambers of the legislature— The federal House of Representatives,

The Committee on Women Affairs and Youth Development which has condemned the Safiya judgment through its chairperson, Hon. Florence Aiya should now address the issue of FGM in its workshop on the protection and promotion of the right of women and youth in Nigeria. In February 2002, I hope members of the FHR will see Uncut playing live with the Minister of Finance who promoted education and entrepreneurship, recognizing the potential relevance of YBI and the Prince's Trust model for Nigeria. On her return from Nigeria, Mrs Alero

Okotie-Eboh Jadesimi, in liaison with Richard Street, Executive Director, YBI – UK and Mrs Ginny Spittle (member Advisory Board YBI International) assembled a Board of Trustee with Chief Emeka Anyaokus as Chairman. Among the members are Chief (Mrs.) Toyin Olakurin, Mr Akintola Williams, Alhaji Aliko Mohammed, and a voluntary executive board. The President of Nigeria is the ex-officio patron. President Obasanjo has a particular interest in YBI Nigeria. It was his contact with His Royal Highness, Prince Charles of Wales in 2000, which alerted him to the work of the Prince Trust and Youth Business International and he was very pleased to learn that YBI Nigeria had just been established by Mrs Alero Okotie's Eboh Jadesimi.

YBI Nigeria is a non-governmental, nonprofit business organization aimed at reducing unemployment in Nigeria by availing young people of the opportunity to start and own their businesses. It works with people between the ages of 16-30, regardless of educational qualification and those who have viable business proposals but are unable to find finance from other sources. It provides each successful supplicant with volunteer business mentors and full access to the YBI business support network. The client businesses are monitored by the mentors and staff for three years to ensure that they are well established.

YBI has begun with a pilot programme of 30 projects in Lagos State but aims to roll out to other states in 2002. So far, nine loans have been granted to a variety of business cybercafé at Iju, garri marketing at Obalende, marketing of upholstery and cabinet materials at Ikorodu, hair and beauty salon at Festac, catering services at Ijeshatedo, bus transport at Obalende, hat making at Iponri estate, electrical repair shop at Iju, marketing of video VCDs, film etc. at the Trade fair Complex, Badagry expressway. Appropriate volunteer mentors such as information on beauty culture technologies, a business consultant, a fashion designer, etc. who received Nigeria and a Youth Business International representative, have been assigned to all the beneficiaries.

YBI Nigeria solicits and receives support from multinational and national organizations, corporate bodies and partners and other NGOs with similar objectives. It holds monthly forums with YBI clients, mentors and staff. The forums provide information on finance, insurance, apprenticeship and management for clients and a forum for them to discuss their problems and constraints. YBI's well-crafted publicity targets both prospective young clients and volunteers.