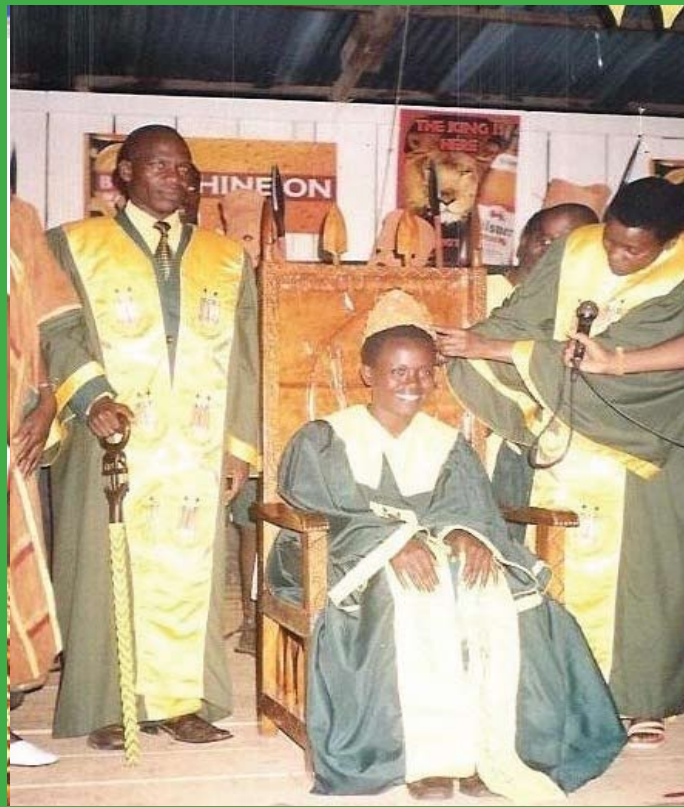


APPRECIATING THE VALUE OF CULTURE IN DEVELOPMENT

There Is Money
In Culture Too!

Koogere:
Where culture, gender
and development meet



The experiences of
Engabu za Tooro 2008



www.engabuzatooro.or.ug

Table of Contents

A. THERE IS MONEY IN CULTURE TOO! Engabuza Tooro's work with cultural service providers	3
Cultural services and income generation	3
The decline of cultural services in Tooro	4
EzT and revitalising cultural services	5
EzT's cultural approach and the Talent Development programme	6
What changes?	7
Lessons from the EzT approach	11
B. KOOGERE: WHERE CULTURE, GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT MEET	13
Women, culture and development in Tooro	13
EzT and its cultural approach	14
The Koogere programme	15
Achievements	17
Challenges	19
Conclusion: the role of culture in development	20



THERE IS MONEY IN CULTURE TOO!

Engabu za Tooro's work with cultural service providers

Cultural services and income generation

Engabu za Tooro (EzT), a development NGO in Tooro, western Uganda, was stimulated in the course of its work to research Tooro's cultural environment and to ask hard questions: How can one achieve development through culture? Why are people not much interested or involved in cultural activities?

Summary

Until recently, the services provided by Tooro's poets, those officiating at traditional marriage ceremonies, "cultural educators" and entertainers, were undocumented, poorly "packaged" and rarely profitable. Interest in these professions had waned and cultural practices, norms and services were not preserved. Local culture had lost meaning and was eroded by strong foreign influences.

In reaction to this, Engabu za Tooro (EzT), a local NGO, has tried to formalise and professionalize cultural service provision to turn culture not only into a source of pride, but also a source of income for economic development. Revitalising cultural services demanded that authenticity be married to new circumstances. This was done by taking into account "modern" tastes and development challenges; repackaging cultural entertainment; training events, developing a marketing strategy; and

research, documentation and publishing.

EzT's work has made a mark in different ways: practitioners' cultural and performing skills have improved, as well as their management skills. Cultural service provision is becoming a source of income for many people both inside and outside the organisation. The number of cultural practitioners is rising, because demand for their services is expanding. Culture is increasingly acknowledged as integral to development and the general community has a new alternative form of entertainment that is affordable, educative and socially constructive at its disposal. Today, many people are therefore enriched by their traditions and their cultural heritage.

Several learning points arise from EzT's experience: first, that culture must be considered a resource in development; it has great mobilisation and inspiring power. Programmes that organise and modernise people's cultural expressions in music, drama and dance for development are part of this. Secondly, for cultural practices to survive, they must be documented and preserved, many people must be knowledgeable of their culture and willing to identify with it. Third, culture can be a money-maker by preserving and organising a range of cultural practices, services and entertainment in a professional way. EzT believes that several income-generating culture practices can be replicated elsewhere. These include developing cultural collection centres, modernising cultural entertainment and services; and research and publications.

EzT found some answers to these questions by looking at culture itself. This led to several initiatives, including a programme to encourage youth and women to develop their talents and earn an income through the provision of cultural services. This was in a context where cultural service providers had lost much of their previous aura: they were rarely professional in their approach and did not earn a living through their trade.

This part of the document shares EzT's experience in organising and professionalizing cultural resource persons, so that culture is seen not only as a source of pride, but also a source of income for economic development.

The decline of cultural services in Tooro

A range of cultural services has long existed in Tooro. Providers have included dancers, spokesmen at marriage introductions, *isenkati bantu* (women who teach young boys and girls to live according to culturally accepted norms), poets, musicians, rappers and story tellers.

Such services have long been important to pass educative messages, to settle conflicts, to entertain, to help young people behave in suitable ways, to ensure successful marriage ceremonies (a young man could not directly ask a father-in-law for his daughter's hand), to promote moral values, and generally to preserve Tooro's cultural heritage.

Traditionally, cultural service providers enjoyed a high social status. The community respected them for their knowledge: they would sit at the high table during social functions, act as advisors and mediate in conflicts. This reflected a common belief that they embodied societal norms; their knowledge, often acquired informally around the fireplace from parents or friends, represented the wisdom of earlier generations.

With increasing poverty, however, many Batooro turned their attention to income-generating projects, such as in agriculture, rather than to cultural services, where payment was often in kind (local beer or food) and insufficient to earn a living. Standards declined: cultural practices were not preserved; practitioners were no longer trained or sufficiently knowledgeable to deliver in a professional way. Since they had informally passed on

their knowledge to immediate friends or relatives, the wider community had few opportunities to learn how to reclaim high standards. Quality worsened so much that anybody could become a cultural practitioner and, because such services had not been documented, there was no point of reference. No one considered such documentation important, which also contributed to poorly developed cultural tourism. Further, with fewer practitioners in existence, services became scarce, even absent in the remoter parts of Tooro. Means of popular mobilisation (such as drumming to call people for community work) were also disappearing. Finally, from around 1990, another challenge emerged: foreign cultural practices, including video shows, and night discos, had become increasingly popular, especially with the youth.

The remaining part-time practitioners survived



The decline and revival of cultural services

Moses Mugabo has officiated at many cultural functions in Fort Portal and shares his story: *"I provide cultural services, working as a spokesperson during cultural marriage ceremonies, singing songs about cows and teaching cultural dances. I learnt these skills from my father when I was young, sitting at the fireplace. Sometimes I would go and assist him in his work.*

"But at that time these services were not as profitable as they are today and no one would risk depending on them for a living. People would only be paid in-kind. So providing such services might be a source of pride, not income! There was no specialised training as today. Very few people had the required knowledge and at one point these services were almost no more. I had started selling second-hand clothes to survive. With EzT's intervention, I decided to join the cultural service provision section. I now entirely depend on providing cultural services for a living."



A cultural exhibition by EzT staff during a public function

It is after this exhibition in 2003 that ideas about reviving cultural services started being developed.

in a disorganised fashion on side incomes from agricultural labour, animal rearing, or charcoal burning. Cultural services provision had lost its prestige and had become less relevant to people's lives. Important knowledge was dying away and, with discos and other forms of entertainment, moral norms suffered, such as in immodest dressing or disrespecting elders. Culture had reached the point of losing meaning.

because of her extraordinary wisdom, courage and hard work. Her legacy had prevailed across generations through oral literature and EzT decided to use the strong motivational aspects of this tradition to inspire women to get involved in income-earning activities. A contest is now organised every 2 years where women below 35 years compete to become a *Koogere*, a woman excelling culturally and entrepreneurially.

EzT and revitalising cultural services

EzT was stimulated to research Tooro's cultural environment in the course of its work. At the time, it was managing an entrepreneurship promotion programme, with a focus on agricultural projects for income, but found that women's participation was low: they were not expected to take part since this would take them away from domestic work. Youth often appeared to be equally disinterested.

In 2003, the organisation also held the first of its annual "EzT week", a cultural festival to mobilise goodwill for the organisation's values and programmes from national and international supporters. It was also meant to motivate the community, especially women, to strive for excellence through income generation and to revive some of the cultural values and practices that were withering away. The EzT Week attracted much attention. Many visitors were interested in the range of activities on display, including an exhibition of cultural materials, cultural performances and the crowning of the *Koogere*.

EzT realised that some answers could be found by looking at culture itself. A number of questions however immediately arose, including the reasons for people's disinterest in cultural activities, how best to make cultural services commercially viable; and more generally how development could be achieved through culture. These were important questions that gave EzT direction on next steps.

EzT had become a reference point for culture and needed to professionalize its own services: it recruited knowledgeable traditional dance trainers, got instruments and started to train interested youth in performing skills and the arts of cultural entertainment. This was to help them become more creative and sustain a living from providing cultural services, first as part of EzT's own entertainment troupe, later to train other budding practitioners as well. EzT also trained individual services providers through a "Koogere cultural school". Out of the team that was trained, a few individuals also joined an EzT cultural

For women, Tooro's history provided the figure of a female heroine, *Koogere*, said to be the greatest woman ruler and the richest person on earth,



Cultural service providers (top) preparing a bride (in light blue) to give the groom and his team milk (bottom)



Two EzT initiatives: the Cultural Troupe and the Koogere School

1. The Cultural Troupe started in 2004 to enable youth with talent in the performing arts earn a living. With youth well trained in traditional dances, the troupe has now become a reference point for any cultural function in the area. The troupe, currently with 52 members, is in high demand to offer cultural entertainment, for instance during EzT's popular weekly theatre shows.

2. The Koogere Cultural School also started in 2004 to offer week-end classes in modernised cultural practices, such as training "aunties" and spokespersons for weddings ceremonies. The school admits all categories of people for 3 months, without any age limit, on a first come first served basis, but a fee is payable. Participants are encouraged to attend through radio advertisements and during cultural public function such as EzT's cultural evenings. Sections for children (3-5 and 7-10 years), for teenagers (11-16) and for adults are sometimes segregated by sex, depending on the subject. The school aims at empowering communities with the knowledge and skills that will enable them earn a living from their culture, and to solve other problems (such as curing diseases with local traditional medicine). Lecturers are experienced cultural service providers.

consultancy team. Eventually, others formed their own groups to provide cultural services.

EzT also started its small public museum, to collect and house cultural items, to signify the dynamic nature of society, to signal that every one should be

party to the change-making process, and to better appreciate their heritage. It would also equip people with skills in using traditional cost-effective items, such as food stores, baskets, and food preservatives.

EzT's cultural approach and the Talent Development programme

Eventually, these activities came together into a "Talent Development Programme", to enhance people's cultural heritage and to adapt it to current economic needs. The programme helps communities to discover talents for sustainable livelihood and to develop them to earn incomes from cultural expressions. It also disseminates development information using music, dance and drama for holistic and sustainable community development and helps to develop alternative entertainment that is affordable, educative and constructive. EzT's cultural approach can thus be defined as *an approach that identifies cultural strengths and integrates them into development strategies*, such as empowering people economically through cultural service provision. Revitalising cultural services therefore demanded that authenticity be married to new circumstances. This was done by:

a. Adapting cultural expression to "modern" tastes and current development challenges

Research helped to identify cultural practices that could be repackaged, documented and modernised, while raising standards. Thus, different formations and episodes leading to a climax in cultural performances were developed to increase appeal, such as dancing with several pots spectacularly balanced on the head. Dances from other Ugandan regions were also introduced to interest the public and to improve local skills. Similarly, the contents of the museum were adapted to meet the interests and challenges of visitors: fuel saving stoves, traditional perfumes used during introduction ceremonies and improved household furniture were added.

Now that development theories recognise culture, music, dance and drama as effective instruments for community mobilisation and education, EzT also developed a weekly evening cultural entertainment (*Hakyoto Mukairirizi* "evenings at the fire place"), held at a garden restaurant in Fort Portal, Tooro's main town, as an alternative form of educative and socially constructive entertainment.

Traditional perfume and smoking basket at the EzT museum



b. Training events

Culture is a medium for individual reflection and learning. EzT thus trained spokespersons to lead marriage delegations, aunties (*the isenkati bantu*), musical performers and actors, as well as all those interested in cultural service provision. Training is offered through week-end classes at the Koogere Cultural School, which also acts as a means of preserving positive aspects of the local culture. Lessons cover such topics as making the cultural heritage locally accessible; culture and indigenous knowledge as it relates to development interactions; and upgrading cultural knowledge and skills transfer systems (for example the role of mothers and aunts in nurturing young boys and girls into becoming responsible and knowledgeable of their cultures). It also covers such themes as traditional marriages and their relevance to modern civil and religious marriages; helping young women and men who are yet to get married to be faithful, respectful, disciplined husbands and wives; and traditional and modern concepts of the family.

At the end of the training, participants are awarded certificates of merit and officially commissioned as cultural service providers.

c. Developing a marketing strategy

To inform the public on the role of culture and the need for cultural services, EzT used plays, cultural dances, radio programmes and talk-shows, publications, and other functions, including the EzT week

and its annual general meeting. Songs are used, such as the *ekirale* song, to encourage people to reflect on their role in development. Videos, banners, attractive costumes, brochures for cultural services, films on cultural dances, documentaries on performances and cultural evening shows are all part of this effort.

d. Researching, documenting and publishing:

EzT started researching different cultural practices and is in the process of documenting and publishing them, to help preserve culture in an organised and professional way. As with the cultural museum, this attracts local researchers and foreign scholars, thus enhancing income from culture.

What changes?

EzT's efforts have made a mark in different ways:

a. More professional services

First, skills have improved: the dancing expertise of performers has progressed "beyond natural, in-born ones", and they have acquired talent in other cultural dances. The rappers now direct their words to a particular context, such as a social problem (AIDS, drunkenness). Spokespersons at marriage ceremonies have become sure-footed; performing artists have also become more skilled in blending traditional music with more modern perspectives, including current development messages such as gender emancipation, hard work, or joining a development initiative. The skills of the cultural consultants are also improving and being passed onto others, as they compare with each other and improve quality in the process.

Secondly, performers have sharpened their management skills: within groups, someone is groomed as a leader, another as costume manager, instrument manager, and site manager. Time management has also improved. Cultural consultants have enhanced their management skills in leading teams to a marriage ceremony. Spokespersons at marriage ceremonies know the programme to follow.

Thanks to such improvements, the EzT cultural troupe has won two prestigious awards, acknowledging their contribution to development in the region. The Rotary club of Kabarole awarded one of its

members, Moses Kigambo, a Vocational Award to recognise his mobilisation efforts for development through music, dance and drama. Kigambo also won the national cultural award at the 2007 Pearl of Africa Music Festival, as best cultural performer.

b. Economic gains for practitioners

Cultural service provision, ranging from entertainment to marriage services and hiring cultural items and handicrafts, is becoming a source of income for many people, both inside and outside the organisation. EzT has trained 78 practitioners in providing cultural services, with most of these now working on their own, and 6 retained as EzT employees. EzT has also trained 134 youth in the entertainment section. Of these, 82 have formed their own groups while others went into different professions.

Those who trained in cultural entertainment and formed cultural troupes today earn at least U.shs. 50,000/= every weekend they perform. 50,000/= is also the minimum charge for a spokesperson – a must for any introduction ceremony. Fully established and popular service providers earn enough (U.shs. 200,000/= to 300,000/=) for a living. Examples include Mica Drama actors, and the renowned local artist Easy Linton.

c. Income for EzT

EzT has established consultancy services, with income from providing spokesmen or rappers for marriage ceremonies, consultants to help in identifying marriage partners through cultural means, making traditional decorations, providing utensils for cultural ceremonies, and offering information and contacts on local history to researchers. EzT also generates income from foreign students who come to study local cultural practices.

EzT consultants are facilitated whenever they provide services and share the fees with the organisation, with 60% going to the consultant. EzT also looks for markets and provides any necessary materials. *“Today we have won the battle of the local market with an ever increasing audience and this has helped to attract foreign exchange from cultural tourists”* says the head of the Talent Development Programme. EzT is also benefiting from the weekly theatre sessions, with its growing audience and income. By partnering with other cultural entertainment groups, an audience has been attracted beyond the Tooro Kingdom and winning awards has also attracted a wide public, including custom-

ers who hire the EzT troupe, within and outside the region.

More than 60 people thus earn a performance fee, monthly facilitation or get school fees from EzT’s consultancy income. Trainers and managers also earn a salary at EzT, and get exposed to development initiatives in other parts of the country, as and when the EzT cultural troupe performs outside Tooro.

d. Changes in the community

Today, the number of cultural service providers is increasing, compared to the previous situation of part-time practitioners. This is because the demand for services is rising: people increasingly acknowledge culture as an integral part of development and the general community has a new form of entertainment that is affordable, educative and socially con-



EzT’s Moses Kigambo during Ekirale’s launch in Fort Portal. Kigambo won the Pearl of Africa Music award with this song, as the best national cultural singer in 2007.

A modernised song: Ekirale (legacy)

Rutooro excerpts

*ekirale x2 ekirale
ekirale kyawe kiraha. hmm hmm
kuburwa ekirale bwinazi bubi.*

*ekirale x2 ekirale
ekyomweb embezi wawe kiri nkaha,
ekirale kya tooro kikaburrankaha mugire
twombeke ekirale.*

(Legacy, legacy
where is your legacy?
Not having a legacy is a shame.

Legacy, legacy
where is your leaders’ legacy?
where did Tooro’s legacy go?
let us build our legacy now).



The EzT cultural troupe during a cultural evening

Such performances have enabled EzT to build a large audience

structive at its disposal. The type of entertainment provided is changing – from discos to more acceptable cultural entertainment, where parents will not hesitate to send their children. This form of entertainment is increasingly appreciated, as highlighted by the prizes given to such performers by political and kingdom leaders. Local leaders and develop-

ment workers also increasingly turn to culture as a means to foster their work, especially in using cultural entertainment to pass on their messages.

Many other people now also take an active part in this renewed cultural cycle: on the one hand, some hire culture services. On the other, some provide



**Resty
Balinda in
her craft
shop**

I was involved in cultural service provision. Our relationship developed when I was hired to advise EzT during the preparations for the first Koogere contest and, two years later, to join the jury for the second Koogere award. I could do this because of knowledge from my parents: my mother and aunties would teach me how to grow up as a respected woman, so I can now train young girls and those who are about to get married. Previously, performing services as an auntie was unpopular, because of the scarcity of service providers in the region during the 1980s and 1990s. Cultural services had disappeared from the public eye. Handicraft materials were only bought by tourists who would find us in our craft shops by accident. Now, the system is more organised: I am glad that many people know that I am an expert and respect my specialty in cultural service provision. I cannot fail to get money because cultural services are on high demand, especially in Fort Portal. I encourage young people to pick interest in learning these services.” - Resty Balinda

Two successful cultural consultants

“I am an agriculturalist, but also an entrepreneur specialising in cultural services. I work as spokesperson at cultural marriages and provide services in Bunyangabu and Burashya counties in Kabale, and sometime as far as Kyenjojo and Ankole. I got to know EzT in 2003, when we were taught how to start income generating projects and to form groups by EzT staff who had come to my home area. EzT also decided to train us in cultural service provision, especially those of us who did not have much interest in business and group formation. This was an opportunity for me because I had learnt something about this from my parents and relatives when I was young. EzT also taught me skills such as marketing, customer care and general knowledge of other cultures. From that time, I formed a bond with EzT and I became a member. In the past, these services were not very organised but today the systems are orderly and people are interested in them. I earn well: for example, in one function on a good day, U.shs 250,000/= to 300,000/=. My customer base keeps increasing and currently I can get 30-40 people annually. One of the challenges is that sometimes I can spend two or three months without being hired. Many people are also joining the trade and perhaps in time our profits will reduce because of increased competition.” - George Karamagi

“I specialise in handicraft and work as an auntie (isenkati) to advice young boys and girls to behave in acceptable ways. I heard of EzT because

and preserve cultural artefacts. Many women in Tooro excel in selling handicrafts and hiring out cultural items, such as calabashes, mats, *ebyanzi* (traditional milk pots) and traditional attire for ceremonial occasions. This increases respect for artefacts and their careful preservation at home. They also work with EzT to preserve culture by collecting items for the Cultural Museum.

Today, many Batooro are therefore enriched by their traditions and their cultural heritage. People can then use cultural strengths, such as cultural services and entertainment, to solve contemporary problems, such as youth poorly aware of their cultural values, including the importance of clans and knowing one’s extended family.

Others have started to sensitise the public on having pride in one’s culture and in the role of culture in development. Rvd. Richard Baguma, for instance, a renowned cultural activist, has stressed the need to use culture for development during *Muzahura* (“Liberator”), a local radio programme on the Voice of Tooro. He has also been at the forefront of promoting people who use culture to earn a living, such as helping young men to become effective spokespersons during traditional marriage functions. Gertrude Balinda is another presenter on Voice Of Tooro, who has used the radio as a platform to sensitise the public on the relevance of positive cultural values.



Kabagambe, the founder of Mica Drama Club (right), acting at one of the cultural evenings in Fort Portal

Mica Drama Club

"I am the founder of Mica Drama Club. I was introduced to EzT in 2004 when the first Koogere was crowned. During that function, different cultural troupes performed and from that time I became interested in cultural entertainment. In 2004, I decided to join the EzT cultural troupe, trained as a drama actor and I have remained a member since then. During my first days in the troupe, we would be trained on-the-job by professional trainers hired by EzT.

After getting these skills, I decided to form another group in my home area (Rutete in Kabarole) in 2006. The group has 27 members and we provide cultural services, such as music, dance and drama to the local communities. In a good month, the Club gets U.shs. 150,000/=, but there are months when we only get 50,000/= We also have challenges such as members wanting quick profits. Since it is a young institution, the Club needs much marketing, which we are currently doing. Progress is promising because people now know what we do." - Edward Kabagambe

and inspiring power: this has been witnessed in different fora, including the EzT weekly theatre sessions.

Secondly, a cultural practice will only survive if it is documented and preserved, so that many people become knowledgeable of their culture and are willing to identify with it. The preservation of cultural items as part of one's cultural heritage is important in this respect.

Third, culture can be a money-maker by preserving and organising a range of cultural practices, services and entertainment in a professional way. Thus, EzT has been able to "earn" through culture and to help others do likewise. Further, cultural talents do not require high school qualifications. Now that people earn money from cultural services, its "backward" perception as being unprofitable and irrelevant to the rising demands of development is challenged.

Of course, not everybody has been successful: some practitioners are too ambitious and feel they will achieve after a week or two, yet skills can only be acquired over time and need consistence. They fall by the wayside. Others expect quick monetary gains, and get discouraged when they do not get an immediate monthly fee, like other successful individuals. Others are not focused on the task – they have different interests, especially adolescents.

There is also a danger of cultural services becoming elitist, as when practitioners are hired by wealthy people only. Nevertheless, wedding spokespersons are a must: if one cannot afford a spokesperson, or does not have a friend who can ably represent him, one cannot have an introduction and get married.

Fourth, EzT believes that there are a number of income generating cultural practices that can be replicated elsewhere. These include:

Lessons from the EzT approach

EzT's experience has led to several learning points.

First, in the effort to enable people appreciate and tap the potential of their immediate environment, culture must be considered as a great resource for development, rather than a constraining factor. We therefore need to examine what exists in people's culture to be brought forth to facilitate development interventions. Programmes that organise, develop and modernise people's cultural expression in music, drama, dance, art and material culture for development are part of this. Culture has great mobilisation

A consumer speaks

I like attending functions, especially those with cultural entertainment, to relieve stress from work. In the past, we would never have such services but today one can have a good weekend, watching cultural dances and drama. Parents bring their children to the cultural evenings, not afraid that they will see entertainment that leads to moral decadence. This kind of entertainment is affordable and educative. We learn what we never learnt in the past"- Florence Kyamiza

The danger of an elite urban bias

“I trade in bicycle spare parts and live in Kahangi, Burashya. I like cultural entertainment. At home, we had the Kahangi drama group, specialising in cultural performances. These were educative, entertaining, promoted our culture and would provide members of the troupe with income for their welfare. Because of the increasing demand for cultural dances, however, members joined other troupes in Fort Portal that are more experienced, pay better and provide opportunities, which is good for their welfare and career growth. We however hope to have another troupe that will keep Kahanga entertained and promote our culture.” - Julius Sabiiti

- Modernising cultural entertainment and services: culture can be used in any context to sensitise the public and mobilise resources for sustainability. In many of our cultures, cultural services are a practice, but often informally: they need professionalism to elicit public interest and hence income.
- Developing cultural collection centres, such as museums, to attract people from different walks of life to come and learn about their heritage, the evolution of their society and to purchase items.
- Research, documentation and publications to preserve culture in an organised and professional way and attract foreign visitors and scholars, themselves a potential source of income.



Moses Kigambo hands over the Pearl of Africa music award to Tooro elders

Koogere: Where Culture, Gender and Development Meet



This part of the document describes Engabu za Tooro (EzT) made use of *Koogere*, a historical heroine in Tooro, to enhance women's participation in business activities. EzT is keen to share its experience with development practitioners, local leaders and policy makers so that their practice is informed by a greater appreciation of the role of culture in development.

Women, culture and development in Tooro

Until recently, Tooro society was characterised by a clear division of labour based on gender, age, and experience. Gender-wise, there were sharp divisions: child bearing and up-bringing, domestic chores and producing food for subsistence were ascribed to women. Men were in charge of the heavy work related to construction, cultivation for commercial gain, defence, and exploring new horizons.

Women were therefore not expected to engage in business. Their roles were perceived as predominantly confined to the local – not leaving home, not attending meetings, not even going to markets (men would do the shopping). Women could not own land and have their own income. They were thus entirely dependent on men and were unable to maximise their potential or contribute significantly to the household income, although they were responsible for homestead food security. The gender gap be-

Summary

Engabu za Tooro, an indigenous non-governmental organisation based in mid-western Uganda, has sought to address the challenge of low women participation in income-generating activities by adopting a “cultural approach”.

This entailed exploring how culture could be used, not only to understand gender disparities, but also to enhance society's appreciation of the role of women in economic development through entrepreneurship. In particular, the figure of *Koogere*, an ancient heroine, was researched and used. A *Koogere* award was constituted and young women encouraged to compete for it every 2 years. The winner becomes a public figure who should emulate the ancient *Koogere* and advocate for women's involvement in entrepreneurship, using herself and the ancient *Koogere* as reference points.

The *Koogere* award has helped EzT change attitudes towards development by building women's confidence and competitive participation in development activities. Women are motivated to participate and emulate *Koogere* qualities, because this brings pride to their clan, family, the groups they work with, and they are associated with success. In the communities targeted by EzT, the groups formed have started economic and cultural projects that stimulate hard work, creativity and bring income to members and their households. The *Koogere* contests have also built the confidence and involvement of women in other public activities.

Koogere is today recognized as a celebrated cultural figure. Community perception towards gender has changed: unlike the past, when men restricted their wives from income-earning activities, many women are today free to participate. Communities have responded positively because the approach proved relevant to their perception of gender: culture has become a practical reality and catalyst for development, eliciting people's support and local ownership.

Cultural strengths should therefore be integrated into development practice to command a sense of pride and ownership among beneficiaries. This is demonstrated in the *Koogere* programme where culture is viewed as a tool or catalyst for effective work; and where culture is no longer divorced from development.

tween men and women was especially wide in rural areas. Some communities hardly counted a single woman entrepreneur (with the exception of women close to the royal family, some of whom had gone to school). While women's welfare generally was poor, many men were thus prospering, by virtue of culturally prescribed gender roles.

In the past 20 years, Government and NGOs have attempted to address gender imbalances by involving women in economic activities, training them in technical skills and entrepreneurship, providing information, micro-credit and support services in sustainable agriculture. While these attempts have registered some success (as with women joining income generating groups), little was done to address women's inferiority complexes, especially in the rural areas; and decision-making processes often remained in men's hands (even in cases where women were involved in producing this income). Some programmes also focused on the towns, to the detriment of the rural areas; and the short-term perspectives of many projects made addressing structural gender imbalances difficult.

EzT and its cultural approach

In 1996, Makerere University graduates from Tooro who belonged to a cultural association started an initiative to attract students, enhance their skills and contribute to the development of their region. About 100 received entrepreneurship training, with the expectation that they would return home and use their new skills. These high school "drop-outs" however preferred to seek employment in towns, Kampala or Fort Portal; there were few success stories.

The initiators then turned to the less educated who had realistic expectations and responded more positively. In 2000, the organisation they formed, EzT, thus started an Entrepreneurship Promotion Programme to help Tooro's youth who had no education qualification to start, manage and resource an income-generating project, with a target of 40% being women. While this proved successful in terms of sustained interest and commitment, the participation of young women was minimal (5% or even none).

When EzT undertook research to better understand this low participation, it found that cultural norms excluded women from income generation and other forms of development initiatives. Appreciating the nature of this constraint, EzT chose to adopt a "cul-

tural approach": using culture itself to address the issue. This entailed identifying the cultural obstacles to such innovations, in order to negotiate adjustments and to utilise cultural positively.

The research helped EzT to deepen its own reflection on traditional and modern perceptions of gender. In particular, it pointed to the importance of integrating culture in development strategies that aimed at improving the livelihoods of rural women. Until then, development practitioners rarely considered the role of culture in their projects: they failed to consider the plight of women resulting from the cultural constraints that restricted their participation, which in turn stemmed from their limited involvement in decision-making. This realisation helped EzT to



An artist's impression of Koogere

Who was Koogere?

Although documentation on Tooro's traditional heroes and heroines is limited, at the time of undertaking its research, EzT found that some were still referred to in present day life and could be used to promote women's entrepreneurship. EzT selected Koogere Atwooki, the heroine in the ancient tradition of the people of the former Bunyoro-Kitara empire, said to be more than 1000 years old.

According to this tradition, Koogere, herself the king's daughter, was the chief of the Busongora region and the richest person on earth, thanks to her courage and hard work. Koogere's strong legacy has prevailed across generations, as reflected in oral literature. Today, people still say in relation to wealth and hard work: "Busongora bwa Koogere mbere ikamwa niboroga" (Koogere had so many cattle that they were crying to be milked).

Koogere was also a respected ruler and a wise administrator. She managed to unite diverse ethnic groups in Tooro, and was very much liked by the Bakonzo and the Bamba, who fought for her and protected her in the mountains.

acknowledge culture as an instrument for enhancing creativity, confidence, scientific thinking and for mobilisation to reach development goals.

The figure of *Koogere*, an ancient heroine, was especially researched and used. A *Koogere* award was constituted and young women encouraged to compete for this every 2 years. The winner would then become a public figure who should emulate the ancient *Koogere* and advocate for women's involvement in entrepreneurship, using herself and the ancient *Koogere* as reference points. The reigning *Koogere* would help women form groups and mobilise resources. This case study tells the story.

The *Koogere* programme

The crowning of a *Koogere* involves several steps, starting with the identification of potential candidates. EzT, with its village-based trainers and volunteers, identifies women below 35 years who have initiated income-generating projects, such as in agriculture, poultry, bee-keeping, or retail trade. Potential candidates must belong to a group, with whom they work to improve their project. EzT promotes groups and team work to spread learning and entrepreneurship to the wider community. Group members can be of either sex, but women should at least constitute 40% of the membership, which can vary from 9 to 20.

To identify an eligible group from which the future *Koogere* will emerge, the potential contestant's position of leadership and influence is gauged, as well as the group's objectives, and registration status. Its management practices, including frequency of meetings and subscription fee payment rate are observed. Whether a group keeps written records, and its likely sustainability in terms of members' collective efforts and potential linkages with sources of support are also checked.

Once groups have been identified, approximately 60 selected women attend free workshops for 2 weeks. EzT trains them in identifying and managing an



One of the contestants during the competition (economic and cultural exhibition)

income generating project, and in resource mobilisation and marketing.

Participants are then encouraged to apply for the *Koogere* award. They are invited for an orientation event at which EzT shares the need to include cultural aspects in their work and to help their groups improve their projects in preparation for a



The *Koogere* panel awards marks.

The *Koogere* award

*A central element of the *Koogere* programme is the bi-annual "Koogere Award", established to stimulate women's entrepreneurship and to promote gender emancipation, participation and equality. It is also meant to inspire women to excel in community leadership and in promoting cultural values.*

*EzT looks for women with qualities of leadership and hard-work, who will reflect the ancient *Koogere*'s attributes. These qualities will help the reigning *Koogere* fulfil her roles, including mobilising, leading and guiding other women in the development struggle.*

Young women are encouraged to compete, using entrepreneurship for 70% of the award criteria and 30% for cultural knowledge, practices and exhibitions.

*A panel consisting of the EzT Directors, one staff member, a representative from another development organisation, and a former *Koogere*, assisted by volunteers from national universities (Makerere and Kyambogo) select the winner.*

The contest has been successfully organized twice, attracting close to 100 contestants. It is very competitive and has attracted an estimated one thousand people during the week long EzT celebrations. The next contest is scheduled for August 2008.

final assessment, which includes economic features of projects, as well as cultural knowledge and exhibitions. After orientation, the candidates are also encouraged to undertake cultural research to acquire the knowledge that goes with the *Koogere* title and the ability to provide cultural services, such as opening a craft shop or teaching the youth to behave in a culturally appropriate way. The *Koogere* will eventually be perceived as a success not only with economic projects, but also in cultural activities that raise her public profile.

Three months later, potential *Koogeres* are assessed as to whether they have passed on their skills to their groups. To determine a model project, an independent panel gauges whether the group has started or sustained an economic project, how much members have benefited (if only in the hope of well-defined future prospects) and whether the project attracts other people in the area.

Cultural aspects are also assessed, including the *Koogere* contestants' levels of confidence and leadership quality; traditional wear, various traditional domestic utensils used at home, and their ability to prepare a balanced, healthy diet using time-honoured food. Arts and crafts are looked at, as important for both cultural and economic development. The candidates are also required to present any form of traditional literature, to promote a culture of documentation and preservation of information.

Finally, an awarding ceremony takes place: the participant with the highest score is crowned *Koogere* until the next competition 2 years hence. *Koogere* receives a crown, a heifer, full traditional attire, and a sponsored trip to a gender-related conference or institution, or a cultural exchange visit outside the country.



Koogere 1
working
during a
cultural
marriage
function

The first winner: Alice Basemera

"My name is Alice Basemera, also known as "Koogere 1". I am a self-employed business-woman, involved in cultural service provision and agriculture. Before joining the EzT programmes, I only did domestic work. Although my husband did not prevent me from earning money, I was just following what I grew up seeing - women not engaging in business. After joining EzT, I trained in 3 modules on how to start an income generating project, how to manage it, and resource mobilisation. A Koogere contest was organised, friends encouraged me to participate. I worked hard, using the skills I got from the EzT training and spending time on the project to become a role model. The contest inspired me to become an achiever.

We were 50 contestants. Being a cultural contest that many people participated in, it was an opportunity for me to show the world my ability to promote culture and development. I won, got public recognition, became a public role model, and received many presents. This was the beginning of real hard work motivated by the position I had got in society, where many people would come to see my projects while others gave me advice.

Today I can confidently say that my income from all my projects is better than what I used to get before EzT. I pay school fees for my three children; two in good primary schools and another in a boarding secondary school in Fort Portal. I also managed to return to studies because I had not studied to higher levels. I can also spend for my daily upkeep and save the rest at the end of the month. EzT is a platform that has helped me earn more from cultural service provision, such as cultural research, working as an "auntie" (teaching young people to behave in acceptable ways), hiring out and selling my cultural items such as calabashes for local brew or other handicrafts.

I did not stop at my own projects; I contacted other women and helped them to form groups to earn income from agriculture, crafts and cultural projects. Today their lives are not the same. I also tried with my influence to mobilise resources for women's groups. We organised fundraising functions where many people, including politicians and other well wishers participated. In total I managed to form nine groups with a total of 113 people, 86 women. My influence is still important in the public because I help other women now that I have a bigger voice. Many women's lives have changed as a result of EzT's initiative. It brings together many people under culture, but the end result is development".

Koogere has now become a public figure. Her relatives and EzT first prepare a large party to celebrate her victory, with far-reaching impact in the minds of the many women who attend or hear about her from press releases. EzT supports her as a public and cultural figure to mobilise, sensitise, and train others on development work. The emphasis is on cultural pride: *Koogere* articulates cultural issues, provides cultural services and dresses in a cultural acceptable way. She encourages women to work hard and become entrepreneurial. She officiates at functions that keep her in the public eye. Her appearance in itself emulates cultural values and she is escorted by a traditional royal guard during formal functions. She is also supported to start a cultural project to generate income for herself and portray the values she articulates.

Achievements

The *Koogere* initiative has registered successes at different levels:

a. Changes at individual women level

The *Koogere* award has helped EzT to change attitudes by building women's confidence and competitive participation in development activities. Women are motivated to join the *Koogere* contest and to emulate *Koogere* qualities, because this brings pride to their clan and family, and they are associated with success.

Koogere earns the respect of all members of the community and motivates many women to work harder, to dream of living like her, and of enjoying the benefits and privileges bestowed to a winner. Women's participants in EzT's entrepreneurship training programmes have thus increased from 13 in 2004 to 88 in 2006. This growth has also been helped by the weekly *Koogere* radio programme that sensitises the public on the role of women in business. EzT has successfully trained 300 women, belonging to different groups, in entrepreneurship skills in a period of three years. In 2007, women represented 60% of those trained.

Many women have also become interested in either competing or helping contestants, to show their support to development and the growth of the programme. The local community, including candidates' husbands, is responsible for funding many of the costs related to participation in the contests and the ensuing celebrations.



Koogere 2 (top) being crowned winner in 2005 and (left) *Koogere* working on her farm

Koogere's spouse

"My name is Mr. Muhenda. Rehema Kobusinge is my wife. She has brought pride to our family and her parents. She is a symbol of women emancipation and hard work. My attitude was never biased on women involvement in income generation, but I was quite reluctant. I never encouraged her. Today I realise that encouraging her is the best way to support her morally. We are still working together and we hope to be successful in helping women develop".

Koogere 2

*"Before joining EzT, I was in small businesses, with minimal earnings. With the support of my family, especially my parents and husband, I managed to win and become *Koogere 2*.*

"I have helped other women in my parish to form groups. They are 36 women with small but growing projects. They are all married and their husbands have allowed them to be involved in businesses. The number of women with income generation activities is increasing. The support from their male counter parts has been a good boost. Today community perceptions have changed. Many men are now supporting us women." – Rehema Kobusinge

b. Changes at community level

In EzT's partner communities, the groups formed have started economic and cultural projects that bring income to members and their households. The contests have especially stimulated hard work and creativity among women groups. Some of the cultural projects include: consultancy services such as aunties or *isenkati bantu*, whose role is to help young



Young Koogeres and EzT directors escort Koogere I during a public function

people grow in socially acceptable ways. Craft businesses, packaging cultural marriage gifts and local beer brewing are other examples.

Once EzT stops providing financial support to some of these projects, groups have to seek their own funds. Helped by the resource mobilisation skills provided during the training, some groups members have also been able to join larger networks, either securing support for their groups or providing services such as trainers, including training people on behalf of the Government's National Agricultural Advisory Services.

Other communities too take EzT's experience as an opportunity to learn about gender issues and how cultural practices can be integrated in development work. Candidate *Koogeres* have initiated groups and passed on the ideas they have acquired from their training. Women have joined micro financing institutions; today more women are able to budget, plan and keep records.

The *Koogere* contests have also build the confidence and involvement of women in other public activities. The two *Koogeres* crowned so far have for instance officiated at close to 30 public functions each, including fundraising, worship, workshop facilitation and practical training events.

Young girls and boys admire the older *Koogere* and imitate her. Realising this, *Koogere 1*, Alice Basemera, soon followed by her successor, Rehema Kobusinge, started to teach children how best to live as young people, according to cultural norms. Boys and girls aged between 4 and 14 years have formed *young Koogere* clubs, at which they perform plays

imitating the old *Koogere* and where the *Koogere* teaches them culturally acceptable public behaviour. These children's parents welcomed this initiative and EzT integrated it in its programmes to teach children how best to improve and become resourceful people in society.

c. Changes at society level

Koogere is today recognised as a celebrated cultural figure, emulating the cultural values of hard work and respectful conduct before elders. Community perception towards gender has changed: unlike the past, when men restricted their wives from involvement in income-earning activities, many women are today free to participate. Communities have responded positively because the approach proved relevant to their perception of gender. This explains the increasing number of participants in EzT's programmes. Thus, the chief guest at the crowning of *Koogere 2*, a Director at the Law Development Centre, noted that, after the inception of the *Koogere* programme, many women and men were beginning to realise the importance of women in development. She noted for example the large numbers of people who had turned up to cheer different women in the economic competition. Changing perceptions are also evidenced in the contributions, in cash and in kind, made by people to support the competition and other related initiatives. In 2004 alone, EzT managed to mobilise U.shs. 13 million from people in the region and those in Diaspora.

Gender activists from different walks of life have shown interest and associated themselves with the cultural and economic programme, which they see as an opportunity for women emancipation. *Koogere*

conferences on indigenous knowledge and women emancipation held on a bi-annual basis attract many (320 women and men in 2004). Participants acknowledge the role of women in development and call upon other development practitioners to emulate EzT by promoting women participation in income generating activities.

d. Promotion of cultural values

The *Koogere* programme has also enhanced cultural growth, making culture a practical reality and catalyst for development. Similarly, gender equality and mainstreaming, empowering women for leadership, management and self-reliance are “modern” development strategies that positively relate with tradition: today a view is gaining ground among community and religious leaders, as well as development practitioners, that contemporary development aspirations must find roots and identify with people’s history and tradition to elicit their support and local ownership. In Tooro, this has led many people to accept entrepreneurship-driven programmes, as they not only recognise that they easily relate with their culture, but also feel that their culture is being promoted.

The results EzT is achieving through the programme have thus changed public perceptions, away from seeing culture as a distinct, alienated concept from development interventions. Today there is a growing belief that culture helps to enhance creativity, scientific thinking and can be used to mobilise for development. Modern development concepts that positively relate with the *Koogere* tradition are hard work, wealth, effective administration and leadership, and wisdom.

e. Emergence of a programme on cultural service provision at EzT

As a result of the *Koogere* programme, and to keep a public profile, EzT needed to be knowledgeable about cultural practices and cultural service provision. The latter was also proving relevant to tackle development challenges and act as a source of income.

This necessitated a change in EzT’s structure to match the raising demand for such services. Using a cultural approach and *Koogere* for increased mobilisation has also led EzT to involve more people in its programmes, including economic exhibitions and the EzT annual festival. The organisation has gained recognition from the Tooro Kingdom and religious institutions which use *Koogere* as a mobilisation tool

Other views...

A community member outside EzT’s targeted groups: “I am a resident of Musoma, in Fort Portal town. I learnt how to start a piggery project from *Koogere* 1, Alice Basemera. She taught me how to manage the project for good income. I have never been part of EzT but I thank them for having taught Alice. I hope to be getting U.shs 300,000/= 400,000/= per month. *Koogere* has helped women to work hard by starting income generating projects that promote better living. This programme is good because it promote women’s development. Women never had programmes specifically designed along cultural lines to help them develop. I think that’s why men also like this programme, because culture promotes almost every one in our society. Our culture is not seen as a system imposed on us.” - Mrs. Nganzane

A *Koogere* finalist: “I was a *Koogere* contestant in 2005 and reached the finals. However, I did not win but performed well. In the area where I stay, people are coming to learn from my goats project and banana plantation with vanilla. I have been teaching people the importance of economic diversification to yield from many sources. I am married and my husband has always been fundamental to the success of my projects. The *Koogere* programme helped me a lot. I am grateful to the people who thought about it.” - Fatuma Agaba

A *Koogere* “drop out”: “I contested for the *Koogere* award but did not make it to the final round. My projects were ‘missing’ on some aspects. I also thought that we would be given some facilitation to develop them but unfortunately not. However despite dropping out, I learnt some things that are helping me today, such as project development, marketing and hard work.” – Margaret Kanyunyuzi

during fundraising functions.

Challenges

The *Koogere* initiative has not gone without a number of challenges:

a. Limited resources

Despite the community contributions towards the *Koogere* contests, resources are limited. The programme still targets a restricted number of people, leaving out many communities. Monitoring and evaluating each individual project is also

a challenge, and sometimes not possible. Limited community support to the individual projects and to their *Koogere* candidates results in some failing to match the standards of the competition. Participants' expectations for material support from EzT are also high, leading to disappointment when these expectations are not met. In the last contest, for instance, 115 women registered, but only 50 remained with 20 qualifying as contestants.

b. Other cultures

Tooro has become multi-ethnic and one important group, the Bakiga, do not associate with *Koogere*. This is a challenge: whereas different ethnic groups are comfortably participating in this cultural approach, others are reluctant to buy in. This has led to a demand to have further programmes that relate to the other cultures present in the region.

c. Risk of becoming a traditionalist institution

People have labelled EzT as a “cultural organisation”, pigeon-holed in “culture”. This has affected different people's perceptions of EzT's other work and has sometimes biased people of different cultures who want to participate, but without necessarily being associated with Tooro culture.

EzT's future plans thus include expanding to areas outside the three districts of Kabarole, Kyenjojo and Kamwenge. It also intends to mobilise more resources to control the rate at which contestants drop out and to meet the increasing numbers of targeted groups.

Conclusion: the role of culture in development

New development methodologies, such as participatory and “bottom-top” approaches, require

local community involvement in defining needs and suggesting possible solutions. Such approaches however do not adequately tap onto local cultural resources and most rural communities then find few initiatives to connect with.

An alternative approach acknowledges the relevance of culture to development: there are positive cultural aspects that directly influence the participation of people in development and validate certain community practices. There are also cultural constraints to development and innovations that must be identified to negotiate adjustments and integrate cultural strengths into development practice.

Using a cultural approach is effective and EzT has achieved success, especially in recognising culture as something that is easily understood and associated with; something to be proud of and therefore something that elicits participation because people own the ideas thus generated. Consequently, a community will be committed to making a contribution, including its time, as it is *its* culture that is being promoted.

This explains the success of the *Koogere* programme: it relates to local culture, appreciates the cultural nature of the constraints it addresses, and uses culture to tackle these same issues, such as promoting the cultural values of hard work and creativity. The approach also explains why *Koogere* contests have influenced the perceptions of the youth about culture, as in the emergence of young *Koogeres*, the heightened profile of women in public affairs and community leadership, and the admiration and respect the *Koogere* commands.

The *Koogere* programme thus provides an example where cultural strengths, no longer divorced from development, have become an essential tool and catalyst for effective development and command a sense of pride and ownership by beneficiaries.

Acknowledgements

This document, and the DVD film documentary that accompanies it, is the result of the collaborative efforts of staff at Engabu za Tooro and the Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda. EzT thanks CCFU staff for the interaction, their commitment and their methodological help that made this possible. EzT staff, especially Gerald Kankya, are thanked for their commitment to the research and documentation process.

This publication, produced with the technical assistance of the Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda, is part of its series of case studies illustrating the importance of adopting a cultural approach for sustainable development. This study is reinforced by a DVD film documentatry, which can be obtained from the EzT and CCFU offices

We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Commonwealth Foundation, who funded this initiative.



The Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda
Tel: +256 (0) 312-294675
www.crossculturalfoundation.or.ug