

ARTS AND CULTURE CONSULTATION

WITH

THE ZIMBABWEAN DIASPORA

**A collaborative consultation organised by the Zimbabwe Association
and the Culture Cluster of the Commonwealth Organisations
Committee on Zimbabwe**

July 2013

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ITEM		PAGE
1.	Executive Summary.....	3
2.	Background.....	4
3.	Welcome.....	4
4	Introduction.....	6
5	Launch on behalf of the Commonwealth.....	6
6	Spoken Word Performance by Tererai Karamakwenda.....	9
7	Re-engaging with Zimbabwe: observations and lessons from two recent visits to Zimbabwe:	
7a	<i>‘Re-engaging with Zimbabwe through Arts and Culture’- a report of the May 2012 visit to Zimbabwe by the Culture Cluster of the Commonwealth Committee on Zimbabwe.....</i>	10
7b	<i>‘Sharing our Stories’- the Zimbabwe Association delegation to Zimbabwe July 2012.....</i>	15
8	Chenjerai Hove’s ‘Thinking Culture’....	18
9	Artists Sharing their Stories: Lucian Msamati, Amanda J. Sibanda and Bart Wolffe.....	21
10	Open Discussion.....	24
11	Brainstorming on dreams, opportunities, obstacles, roles.....	25
12	Recommendations.....	31
13	Conclusion.....	33
14	Vote of Thanks.....	34
15	Bibliography.....	35

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Culture Cluster of the Commonwealth Organisations Committee on Zimbabwe (COCZ) and the Zimbabwe Association (ZA) held an all-day Arts and Culture Consultation with the Zimbabwean diaspora in London on 28th June 2013. The event was a follow up to visits to Zimbabwe by both organisations during 2012.

The consultation was a chance for both organisations to share their findings with the Zimbabweans involved in the cultural sector in the UK and internationally following their respective visits to Zimbabwe in 2012. Equally it provided an opportunity to hear the views of Zimbabwean arts and culture practitioners in the UK diaspora.

The existence of a grouping of concerned Commonwealth organisations (the Commonwealth Organisations Committee on Zimbabwe) is testament to the concern that the Commonwealth still has for 'its missing 55th member'. Although Zimbabwe is no longer a member of the Commonwealth, the well-being of its people is a matter of great concern to it. This is especially so because the core values and principles of the Commonwealth enshrined in **the Harare Declaration**¹ speak to good governance and the rule of law. This was as signed up to at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Zimbabwe on 20th October 1991.

The Commonwealth Foundation made this support real through its funding of a scoping visit to Zimbabwe by members of the COCZ's thematic cultural group. Their report, '*Re-engaging with Zimbabwe through Arts and Culture*' - provides a thorough audit of the arts and culture scene inside the country and points to a vibrant cultural life still in Zimbabwe but one where the need is palpable. Years of economic and political crisis have seen many of the nation's most critical cultural sites fall into shameful disrepair.

Artists in Zimbabwe have been resilient and continue to make wonderful creative work. However, roofs leak, libraries contain out of date, inappropriate and un-replenished book collections with miniscule African literature sections, museum collections have not been updated and national monuments such as the Great Zimbabwe have no proper or recent archaeological or historical information to help visitors or the nation think about its role in shaping the history of the country.

The Culture Cluster identified numerous areas of need, not only in relation to infrastructure, but also in policy and strategy. These areas were succinctly addressed in the presentation by Chipso Chung.

The shared stories of the Zimbabwe Association also highlighted a great need – a need to find pathways and means of re-connecting, forming and re-awakening partnerships which might help in the process of bringing the diasporan experience home.

¹ http://www.thecommonwealth.org/document/34293/39455/141099/harare_declaration.htm

During 2012 the Zimbabwe Association also began to explore the way forward for Zimbabweans stuck in asylum limbo in the UK diaspora. Formed in 2001, the Zimbabwe Association had begun life in response to the urgent needs of Zimbabweans arriving in the UK. Having encountered and helped over 3500 Zimbabweans through the asylum quagmire, and with some 85% of Zimbabwean cases resolved, in 2012, the organisation decided the time was right to steer a new course. It took the bold step of making an initial and exploratory return visit to Zimbabwe, a visit which brought to light the need to help develop routes for a safe and sustainable return to Zimbabwe when the time becomes ripe and right.

Culture has thus been highlighted for the role that it can play in re-connecting the diaspora with the homeland, exploring the national narrative and looking for ways to bring healing to community groups of traumatised Zimbabweans. It can also play a role in helping to create opportunities for people to make sustainable livelihoods in a variety of areas, including from arts, crafts and cultural production.

The report that follows explores these themes in more detail and, in what might be the first time, brings the diasporan cultural community together to make their voice heard about the potential role that arts culture and crafts of all manner might contribute to Zimbabwe's renaissance.

2. BACKGROUND

The Culture Cluster of the Commonwealth Organisations Committee on Zimbabwe (COCZ) and the Zimbabwe Association (ZA) organised and held an all day Arts and Culture Consultation with the Zimbabwean diaspora. The event took place on Friday 28th June 2013 in the Theatre in Oxford House in Bethnal Green, London.

The event was intended as a follow up to visits to Zimbabwe made by both organisations during 2012. It formed part of a week-long programme of events, on the theme of *Culture without Borders*, held in conjunction with the Britain Zimbabwe Society.²

3 WELCOME

Participants were welcomed by Wiz Bishop, Vice Chair of the Commonwealth Organisations Committee on Zimbabwe (COCZ) and Partnership and Funding Officer with the Zimbabwe Association (ZA).

² 'Culture without Borders' was a series of events between 25 June 2013 – 1st July 2013 addressing the current day realities of cultural production, creativity and change in Zimbabwe and the diaspora. The flyer of events can be found via: <http://britainzimbabwesociety.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/culture-without-borders-events-flyer.pdf>

The coming together of so many arts and culture practitioners, their support teams and Commonwealth friends provides an opportunity to explore the role that arts and culture might play in building bridges and forging linkages between arts and culture practitioners in Zimbabwe and in the diaspora.

The event has added significance given that Zimbabwe is poised at another critical cross road in its history with the approach of elections.

During 2012 visits to Zimbabwe were made by both the COCZ and ZA. While the two organizations had different remits, both explored the current arts and cultural sector in Zimbabwe and looked at the potential that art, culture and crafts might play in building bridges with Zimbabwe. This theme was expressed in the reports made by both.

The COCZ Culture Cluster report entitled '*Re-engaging with Zimbabwe through Arts and Culture*' provided an audit of the arts and culture scene and needs in Zimbabwe following their May 2012 visit. That visit was only made possible by the support of the Commonwealth Foundation. A central concern of their exploratory visit was to identify the areas of greatest need in the arts sector and to consider how Commonwealth countries – in spite of the political complexities involved – might best address them.

The ZA's '*Sharing our Stories*' report gave an account of the findings of an initial exploratory return visit to Zimbabwe made by a three person ZA team during June 2012. The ZA visit underlined the need to help develop routes for a safe and sustainable return to Zimbabwe when the time is right. It also highlighted the importance of culture in re-connecting the diaspora with the homeland, exploring the national narrative and helping to create sustainable livelihoods from arts, crafts and cultural production.³

Thus the diasporan consultation aimed at being a very practical consultation with tangible outcomes. Invitations were issued to over 100 arts and culture practitioners, managers and promoters from across the whole spectrum of Zimbabwean arts, culture and crafts as well as to the Zimbabwean and wider African/Commonwealth diplomatic community. The programme was designed to share the findings from the two exploratory visits to Zimbabwe and to give time to diasporan artists and cultural activists to share their hopes, dreams, aspirations, and their recommendations

The idea of a diasporan consultation took root as the Commonwealth and ZA looked at how to build on the findings of the two reports and realise the potential for a more meaningful engagement. The Commonwealth report revealed a world of potential and a number of challenges including a great deal of need. The ZA report underlined how important and enriching it is to grow linkages and partnerships between Zimbabwe and her diaspora. In more than a decade of separation, a gulf has grown up between the two and there is need to foster mutual understanding and facilitate opportunities for all. Both the ZA and the Commonwealth have begun to explore what role arts and culture could play in bringing people together, in opening dialogue and in helping heal the wounds.

³ <http://zimassoc.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/sharing-stories-2012.pdf>

The opportunity to bring such an exceptional mix of diasporan arts and culture practitioners together with supporters and friends of Zimbabwe was made possible by the support of the Commonwealth, who continue to refer to Zimbabwe as a missing family member.

Both organisations hope to build on the findings and links made during the visits to Zimbabwe. They propose to explore and gather suggestions about the role that the whole range of arts, culture and crafts can play in helping Zimbabweans to re-engage with each other and with the wider world. We hope this gathering can build linkages and partnerships, open and maximise opportunities and make a contribution to investigating how art and culture can create a sustainable livelihoods for people. Art and culture can help us reflect on who we are, take the sting and polarisation out of talking to each other and begin the process of re-engaging with each other together with friends such as the Commonwealth who care about us and want to see us flourish.

4. INTRODUCTION

Knox Chitiyo, Chair of the Britain Zimbabwe Society and COCZ member introduced the consultation by saying how pleased he was to be amongst so many fellow Zimbabweans linked in culture and the arts. He commended the innovative nature of the event and expressed the hope that it will help establish culture as a key dimension of Zimbabwe's development, both at home and in the diaspora

The other aims of this consultation include:

- To listen to the views of the Zimbabwean diaspora, particularly to share the findings and follow up on the visits to Zimbabwe by the COCZ Culture Cluster and the Zimbabwe Association.
- To explore how Zimbabweans and friends of Zimbabwe (both in the UK and in Zimbabwe) might forge closer partnerships and link up with each other
- To hear views on the role that arts and culture might play in exploring Zimbabwean national identity
- To explore how best to support Zimbabwean artists and cultural performers in making a sustainable livelihood through practicing their craft.

5. LAUNCH PRESENTATION ON BEHALF OF THE COMMONWEALTH

Mark Robinson, the Chair of the COCZ spoke in place of Vijay Krishnarayan, Director of the Commonwealth Foundation. Mark conveyed Vijay's apologies and passed on his best wishes for the meeting, explaining that his travel arrangements to Sri Lanka ahead of the coming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) 2013 had to be changed at short notice.

Mark expressed his pleasure at being invited to open the event in Vijay's absence. He spoke of the strength of friendship, support and concern by the Commonwealth towards Zimbabwe.

The birth of the COCZ followed a roundtable meeting in Johannesburg South Africa in 7-9 July 2009. This brought together Zimbabwean civil society, local government, parliamentarians from the region and other partners, and those from the Southern African region, with representatives of Commonwealth Associations and Organisations.

Coming as it did, shortly after the formation of the Government of National Unity in Zimbabwe, the meeting aimed to:

- Review the needs of Zimbabwe during a period of transition
- Identify priorities for practical help and support
- Develop and strengthen programmes of action

The meeting resulted in the issuing of a statement entitled '*Building a Commonwealth Special Programme for Zimbabwe*'⁴, and, thereafter, the setting up of the COCZ. Since that time the Committee has kept closely abreast of developments in Zimbabwe. It has facilitated practical assistance through its thematic cluster groups, including the Culture Cluster in addition to work of the health, media, local government and other thematic groups.

The Committee has lobbied to keep Zimbabwe on the agenda of various Commonwealth meetings. The COCZ has also facilitated Commonwealth Fellowships for a number of mid level civil society professionals from Zimbabwe to upgrade their skills in the UK during brief Fellowships lasting approximately six weeks.

The COCZ has now forged people to people links with Zimbabwean alumni of the Commonwealth Professional Fellowships. These have included media practitioners, doctors, human rights activists and numerous other mid level professionals from Zimbabwe. They have become ambassadors for the Commonwealth.

Inside Zimbabwe, the Australian Ambassador, an old friend of the Commonwealth Committee on Zimbabwe, has provided an informal meeting network of these alumni.

With elections looming in Zimbabwe, Mark lamented that Commonwealth Observer teams, despite their huge expertise, are once again unlikely to be invited to observe.

He however noted that the Foundation's support for the exploratory trip to Zimbabwe by the COCZ Culture was a huge testament to the hand of friendship that the Commonwealth extends to the people of Zimbabwe. He recalled the oft repeated adage

⁴ <http://www.ngopulse.org/press-release/building-commonwealth-special-programme-zimbabwe>

that *'the people of Zimbabwe did not leave the Commonwealth, Robert Mugabe left the Commonwealth'*.

He underlined how supportive the Commonwealth Foundation and Secretariat have been to the COCZ, which got started when Commonwealth Organisations felt they should do something practical to assist the people of Zimbabwe, even if the country had left the Commonwealth.

The COCZ kept Zimbabwe on the agenda of the 2011 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Perth Australia by preparing a report on the situation in Zimbabwe and the work of the COCZ⁵. This was widely circulated including to CHOGM leaders and at the Commonwealth Peoples' Forum.

At that event Zimbabwean civil society leaders and Commonwealth Fellow alumni, Rindai Chipfunde Vava, the Director of the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN), drew a packed audience and focused minds on Zimbabwe with an update on the Zimbabwean situation.

Referring to Zimbabwe in the Final Communiqué of the 2011 CHOGM, Commonwealth leaders said that they *'look forward to the conditions being created for the return of Zimbabwe to the Commonwealth'*.

Commonwealth leaders pledged themselves to *'continually encourage the parties to implement the Global Political Agreement faithfully and effectively'* and gave encouragement to the idea of people to people support.⁶

The COCZ Chair concluded by highlighting the importance of culture to the Commonwealth, noting that culture transcends all political boundaries.

⁵ An activity report submitted by the COCZ to the 2011 CHOGM entitled *'Zimbabwe Routes to Progress: Commonwealth Organisations' Committee on Zimbabwe Activity Report 2010-201'* can be found via:
http://www.comassoc.org/Zimbabwe_report2011.pdf

⁶ The Final Communiqué of the 2011 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting can be found via:
http://www.chogm2011.org/sites/default/files/documents/COMMUNIQUE_CHOGM2011.pdf

6 SPOKEN WORD PERFORMANCE

Broadcaster and spoken word performer Tererai Karamakwenda helped the flow of creativity with the following performance:

VOICES OF REASON

The voices of reason
Have been silent too long
Love has been forsaken and
Lust has become the lyric in our songs

The daily grind of modern life
Has hardened the human soul
Advances in technology and
Strides towards democracy have created
A huge hole
Yes a deep emotional crater
Full of humans under stress
Surely this cannot be progress!
Is a life made easy by gadgets worth it
If we lose in other facets?
It's the law of diminishing returns my friends
And I fear we will persist until it all ends
Social networks bring together
People who are worlds apart
Yet the benefit is diminished
When we ignore those closest to our hearts

A couple who met via a newspaper ad
For an online site organising speed dates
Sit in a restaurant tweeting about the experience
The news is current, but the moment is missed

We have developed a fear of
Facing life without face booking
Living without tweeting and
Questioning without Googling

Like the great civilisations
That built the pyramids....
We have reached new heights but face extinction

We need those voices of reason
To now speak out loud and strong
To put love back at the centre of our lives
And remove lust from the lyric in our songs.

© **Tererai Karamakwenda**

7. RE-ENGAGING WITH ZIMBABWE: OBSERVATIONS AND LESSONS FROM TWO RECENT VISITS

7. a The Culture Cluster of the Commonwealth Organisation Committee on Zimbabwe – a presentation by Tim Mason, Geoffrey Davis and Chipo Chung

Tim Mason of the Commonwealth Association of Museums (CAM) introduced the small COCZ Culture Cluster which, in addition to himself, consists of Geoffrey Davis of the Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS). In preparing for the visit to Zimbabwe, the cluster was joined by Chipo Chung, a Zimbabwean actress and arts consultant in the diaspora who accompanied the COCZ delegation on behalf of the Britain Zimbabwe Society. Tim acknowledged Chipo's invaluable assistance in introducing them to the key cultural practitioners on the ground and providing local know how.

Geoffrey gave a brief report on the visit to Zimbabwe by himself, Tim and Chipo noting that it was only made possible through the generous support of the Commonwealth Foundation. The visit to Zimbabwe took place from 1-10 May 2012. It was timed to coincide with the 13th Harare International Festival of the Arts (HIFA) and was aimed at undertaking a needs audit of the cultural sector in Zimbabwe.

The full report of the findings, including a list of all the organisations visited and a whole range of recommendations was shared with the COCZ and the Commonwealth Foundation and made available to members of this consultation. A summary of the report's main findings as report's Executive Summary:

- Informal discussions were held with almost one hundred practitioners and administrators across the Zimbabwean arts and culture sector.
- The group attended a three-day symposium on '*Giving Voice to the Artist: The Impact of Current Cultural Policy Discourse on Zimbabwean Arts*', visited events at the Arts Festival and made several site visits.

The focus of the discussions lay on the most pressing issues faced by the arts and culture sector as it emerges from a period of economic depression and continues to confront political responses to artistic expression ranging from indifference to repression.

Prime among these issues were funding, the role of foreign donors, the polarisation and mistrust which exists between government representatives and arts practitioners, the marginalisation of the arts sector, the policy of indigenisation being pursued by government, and the problem of audience development.

A central concern of this exploratory visit was an audit which sought both to identify the areas of greatest need in the arts sector and to consider how Commonwealth countries – in spite of the political complexities involved – might best address them.

With a view to hearing at first-hand how arts practitioners were dealing with the manifold problems they face, discussions were held particularly with museum and gallery directors, arts administrators, publishers, writers, and theatre practitioners.

Collating their combined experience and summarising the gaps in provision for culture and the arts they identified, the following core recommendations are to be made:

- The Commonwealth Professional Fellowships programme should be extended to include a number of Zimbabwean practitioners in the field of arts and culture particularly relating to arts management.
- Twinning should be organised with institutions in Commonwealth countries such as towns, museums, schools.
- Commonwealth embassies should consider working together in support of cultural initiatives, perhaps by offering bursaries to qualified Zimbabweans wishing to undertake study in Commonwealth countries.
- Training facilities in the arts, particularly in arts administration, management and fund-raising, but also in many aspects of basic artistic practice should be provided.
- Zimbabweans in the diaspora should be encouraged to provide networks to the Commonwealth countries and with Commonwealth organisations for arts practitioners inside the country and to pass on their skills and practical support.
- Representation and participation by Zimbabwean scholars and writers should be facilitated at conferences held in Commonwealth countries by organisations involved in the cultural cluster, e.g. Museums (CAM), Literature (ACLALS), and other Commonwealth Civil Society Organisations.

A YEAR ON – WHERE NOW? - A PRESENTATION BY CHIPO CHUNG.

Firstly I want to thank and commend Geoff Davis and Tim Mason for their enthusiasm and commitment as the tiny Culture Cluster of the Commonwealth Organizations' Committee on Zimbabwe. They have committed a great deal of time and energy to learning about the culture sector in our country, and trying to find ways through which the Commonwealth can support it, and use culture to rebuild the relationship between Zimbabwe and the Commonwealth.

I was very happy to join the Culture Cluster when Knox Chitiyo suggested I act as a consultant on their research, because as an artist Culture is going to be the most exciting way that I can engage with home. But also because I believe that UK development work in Africa should be done hand in hand with diaspora, who already have a relationship with Zimbabwe, and who are most likely to be able to take on the work in the future. My hope is that out of this exercise today, we will be able to consolidate more strongly how diaspora artists can act as vehicles of development and connectors for the arts in Zimbabwe.

I think the arts will only become more important to Zimbabwe as we hopefully transition towards a place that is more progressive. There are three reasons I see for the arts to be of primary importance:

1. The need for us, as Zimbabweans, to talk about our Identity. Through the arts we can re-define what it means to be Zimbabwean. Zimbabweans are made up of a multitude of languages, races, cultures, which need to be represented through the arts.
2. As a tool for national healing. There are many wounds over the past fifty years that need to be respected and honoured – the arts can contribute to this process of healing by acknowledging our history and creating spaces for dialogue and remembrance. We cannot move forward with wounds left to fester. The South African TRC was key, not only in creating a public justice system, but also in defining the values that South Africa would move forward with. Idealistic, yes, but without articulating values of mutual respect, conflict will only continue.
3. The Ministry of Tourism has already identified that the arts serve a vital ambassadorial function. Zimbabwe needs a re-brand internationally and that's where we can come in. Mokoomba winning Best Newcomer at the World Music Awards and appearing on Jools Holland was a real eye-opener for Westerners - that these boys from Binga who speak a language hardly anyone in the country, let alone the world understands, are Zimbabweans. For our future generations both at home and abroad, we need to develop a new sense of national pride. So, we, as artists, have a real and necessary function.

The research trip with the Cultural Cluster was largely about listening, which is why on our trip to HIFA last year we spoke to over 100 artists, and which is why this afternoon's session is very much about listening to your views. But given that we are all gathered and have some time for discussion, it would be fantastic if we could come out of today with some clear outcomes. Perhaps a few simple decisions on what our next steps might be, whether to meet again or to make a plan of action about one area.

Our basic findings regarding the systemic challenges were that:

1. Lack of Funding and Marginalization

The Culture Sector has very limited funding. The NAC receives \$600,000 a year, which is barely enough to run its ten provincial offices. It is unable to disburse grants. In countries in which the arts thrive, like Germany, or France, or Britain, this is made possible by government subsidy. Given our more basic needs (sanitation, health, education) culture is not high on the agenda. The Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture will rightly look at Education first, then Sports, and maybe Culture last, but it certainly will not be increasing funding.

This means that funds are largely disbursed by NGOs and Embassies, based on a multitude of agendas, but with no coherent strategy. HIFA has been very successful at harnessing NGO and Embassy support, and has been key in encouraging the corporate sector to sponsor the arts. However, this has led smaller organizations in the sector to feel neglected and marginalized.

We have the opportunity outside the country to fundraise and connect projects with funding, but perhaps the best thing artists both in Zimbabwe and out can do is create the argument for how the arts contributes to the economy, and lobby those in power to support arts initiatives as employment creators. Perhaps the best way we can do this is through enterprise, and showing models that develop the creative economy and show proof of a positive impact.

Not only are the arts marginalized in the Ministry of Education, but they are spread out between 11 different ministries including Information, Tourism, Small and Medium Enterprises and Home Affairs, none of which focus concretely on culture. One issue is whether to lobby with those at home for a stand-alone Ministry of Culture.

2. Polarization and Mistrust

“How do you ensure a cultural policy in a climate of political polarization?” one artist said at the cultural symposium we attended.

There is a perception that the arts, particularly political or protest art, are dangerous. The arrest of Owen Maseko is a case in point. This issue is not particular only to Zimbabwe - South Africa Brett Murray’s painting *The Spear* caused the same response/ shut down in the ANC. All artists are registered and surveilled by the National Arts Council (NAC), all plays have to pass a censorship board. And the threat of arrest is real – a young theatre director I know recently spent a night in jail for a play reading he directed, which had political content.

When I performed a political play at HIFA in 2010, there were police outside the building. This is not an atmosphere in which artists feel free to make work. Obviously this is a larger issue shared with for example WOZA who fight for the right to protest. The arts are a litmus test people’s democracy and personal self-expression. The arts are vital to democracy.

3. Indigenization

Some respect must be given to the Zimbabwean government's attempts to protect national culture. However, sometimes the means can be extreme. There have been some arrests of foreign artists who have been working with the wrong visa papers and there are obstacles created to letting them in – the bureaucracy limits the potential for cultural exchange and prevents genuinely good people who have something to contribute to the sector, from being able to do this easily. (National Allied Arts Organization) But I do agree with the NAC position, which is that Zimbabweans must set the agenda, and foreigners and NGOs must align themselves with that. It's unfortunate that a clear strategic plan has not been laid out by the NAC, which foreign contributors can fit into. The conflict between 'insider' and 'outsider' cultures hampers our development, but this is where the diaspora has an opportunity to contribute as we are Zimbabweans, even though we are outsiders.

Opportunities

These were the major challenges we observed on our trip. But within that were many opportunities. And the Commonwealth can look to contributing in a small way, for instance, one idea could be for a cultural exchange in which cultural players in Zimbabwe travel to other developing countries which do have functional and effective Ministries of Culture, to study their structure and plan for the future. The Culture Cluster has applied for its first Commonwealth Fellow to travel to London later in the year to learn from British Equity and other arts organizations about agency and lobbying within the arts sector here and building an active union of members.

But of course, the over-riding sense from visiting HIFA was encouragement and excitement at the huge talent pool in the arts and the platform they have been given. I've just come back from HIFA 2013, which, in response to the NAC's demands for more local programming, presented a real wealth of local and new talent, from Amarra Brown to Nkulee Dube and Selmor Mtukudzi.

HIFA has also been a great bridge builder for diasporans. I first went in 2010 with a play, and had an amazing time, and have been back two times since. It's helped me build a relationship with young artists who I mentor and who I have seen grow and develop. It's allowed me to build relationships with players on the ground, get my name in the sector, and plant seeds of the kind of work I would like to do there when I return. I know that HIFA is the big fish and that smaller organizations should not be neglected, but for diasporans, it is an international festival and a great platform as an international artist.

I'd like to end my presentation by talking a little bit about a project that I am currently working on. In 2008 I got involved in the elections because my mother was running for a senatorial position. In the aftermath and the violence which took place during the run-off, I went through a period of real soul searching about how I relate to home, and what responsibility we take as diasporans for development at home. Through this I decided that the only way I can contribute effectively to Zimbabwe, is by developing my own talents,

and developing my sector by making creative work that has meaning to this community. I'm not going to help Zimbabwe by joining a political party. I'm going to help by making art.

So the result of this soul searching is a documentary play, which I created through a series of interviews with Zimbabweans in London and at home, which I will be presenting next Saturday during the RADA Festival. I'd love you to join me for it, and as a taster my colleague Takunda Kramer is going to deliver a monologue from the piece. So this is a monologue taken verbatim from an interview which I did with a Zimbabwean who was working here in the banking sector.

© Chipo Chung; 28 June 2013

7. b SHARING OUR STORIES

A Presentation by the Zimbabwe Association delegation to Zimbabwe July 2012 by Margaret Ling and Patrick of the Zimbabwe Association

Margaret Ling, Board member of the Zimbabwe Association and member of the Britain Zimbabwe Society, spoke of the context of why the ZA had decided to go to Zimbabwe. Her presentation made the following points:

- In 2012 the Zimbabwe Association found itself starting on its second decade of support work for Zimbabwean asylum seekers in the UK.
- When the ZA was set up in 2001, its founders never imagined that it would be needed for more than a fairly short time before those it was set up to assist went back to Zimbabwe. So 2012, 11 years on, was a time for serious reflection and self-analysis.
- We felt that we were in a time of change, and that to make the most of it; bold steps were needed to seize opportunities before they disappeared.
- Many of our long-term members were now, after many years in the asylum jungle, obtaining status in the UK and at last able to feel secure and to work legally.
- In Zimbabwe itself, the Government of National Unity, while very disappointing in many ways, had opened up a bit of space for new initiatives, especially those at the community level. We felt that the time was right to start exploring the possibilities for safe and sustainable return for our members.
- This was the context for visiting Zimbabwe, the first visit by the ZA as an organisation, and the first for more than 10 years for each of the three members of

our delegation – myself, as one of the ZA’s trustees, Patrick Sibanda from our Manchester local group and drop-in centre, and Sarah Harland our Coordinator.

Aims of our visit - what the Zimbabwe Association was hoping to achieve

With the support of the Scurrah Wainwright Charity, we spent 10 days in Zimbabwe in July last year, mostly in Harare, but also visiting Shamva, Mabvuku, Mvurwi, Gweru, Gwanda and Bulawayo.

The aims of the ZA were:

- To explore the opportunities for refugees to return safely and in a sustainable way
- To understand the risks and difficulties that they were likely to face
- To build relationships with community-based organisations and to develop partnership links

It’s a common perception that the main obstacle to starting your own business is lack of working capital. This isn’t really true. The fundamental reason is actually fear – fear of the unknown, and lack of confidence in your own ability to deal with it.

The same applies to a refugee returning to their homeland, particularly after many years in which the situation has changed out of all recognition from what they remember from their past life. Fear of the unknown is the key factor.

Our view in the ZA is that the way to conquer fear and anxiety is through getting to know people, talking to them and working alongside them. This is why we called our visit ‘Sharing our Stories’.

Building relationships of shared interest with partners in Zimbabwe is about building a safety net to help people deal with an uncertain and hostile environment.

What has come out of our visit is the beginnings of ongoing partnerships with Zimbabwean community organisations in the areas of agricultural development and food security, community building, education, healing and reconciliation – and culture and the arts.

Our main partner in the cultural sector, to whom we owe today’s theme of ‘Culture without Borders’, is the Pamberi Trust, the parent body for the Book Café in Harare.

We also worked with the Nhimbe Trust, who are based in Bulawayo and collaborate closely with Pamberi as part of a cultural development consortium.

Overall findings

The overall findings of the Zimbabwe Association visit were:

- Healing and reconciliation are pre-requisites for safe and sustainable return for refugees and asylum seekers – without healing, there can be no long-term peace in Zimbabwe. Healing is much more than just saying sorry and forgetting about it. There has to be genuine reparations and restitution of injustice.
- Sustainable return means looking at the big picture – a holistic approach is needed. It's not just a case of a small business grant and a bit of advice, the wider social, economic, political and environmental context needs to be looked at to work out how this can be a win-win situation for both returning diasporans and those at home.
- Culture and the arts are a crucial part of the mix, in establishing identity, building friendships, opening up space for debate and discussion, and in helping people to find solutions to complicated and intractable problems.

Patrick Sibanda, a member of the Zimbabwe Association, took up the story from this point and he made the following observations:

- Culture is a key dimension of healing, recovery of identity & sense of who you are, reconnecting and return
- The two seminars in Harare and Bulawayo - key findings from these: culture is dynamic and borderless (b) need for information, sharing and linking between home and diaspora to achieve brain gain, create synergies, build the market for culture, create opportunities
- Key outcome – the decision to partner and work towards cultural diaspora linkage programme and to build on ZA's 'Zimbabwe Unwound programme'

Patrick noted how culture brings people together, shares skills.

Recalling some of the key points that arose during the roundtable meetings on culture in Harare and Bulawayo, Patrick said that:

- There is a clear need for market development
- Talent is not shared
- There are bureaucratic obstacles to development, for example the restrictions on dual citizenship
- The lack of funding is a real obstacle
- Diaspora as a source of market expansion & support for livelihoods
- Need for linkage to share ideas e.g. via a website

8. REFLECTIONS FROM EXILE

THINKING CULTURE

A Presentation for the Arts and Culture Consultation with the diaspora

By Chenjerai Hove

In 1989, I got a rare telephone call from the Minister of Culture. In my shock, I listened to his superficially presumptuous voice: he was conveying an order from His Excellency for me to write a musical-dance drama to celebrate 10 years of the successes of Zimbabwe's independence. Since it was a presidential order, I was not supposed to have a say on the matter. On inquiring why I was being bestowed with this honour, the minister informed me that the president had liked a short piece which I had created and directed for the Non-Aligned Movement heads of state meeting.

I said to the minister I could do it on condition I am allowed total freedom to portray both the successes and failures of our decade of freedom.

'What failures?' the ministerial voice boomed from the other end.

'We also had failures Comrade Minister,' I dared.

The following day the Director of the National Arts Council was dispatched to bring a huge bunch of papers describing my terms of engagement, including financial rewards. I read most of the documents while he waited for an immediate work programme.

As I turned the offer down, the director stood there in utter disgust. He gave me a day more to think about this 'presidential order.' Still, after that extra day, I turned it down.

Nobody orders an artist to create, I thought.

A few years later, while attending a literary conference in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, I met novelist Jorge Amado who, in a discussion, warned: 'We must all worry about the culture of the minister of culture.' I thought about this wisdom for many years.

In the world of cultural work, the minister of culture is a danger. He wants to impose his definition of culture on the artist. I was also able to add another minister who is a danger to culture: the minister of information who thinks the writer or artist is an unpaid government information officer. Later on, I added the minister of justice who is usually obsessed with making laws that threaten to send artists to prison dungeons. We might also include the minister of home affairs who runs the censorship board which reads all pornographic materials before declaring them unsuitable for public morality. I always wondered why the censorship board is under the same ministry as the ministry in charge of the police.

Why, you may want to wonder, do so many vultures linger on the skies above the writer's head? Why are all artists and culture practitioners so close to the hearts and minds of these politicians?

I think I have some kind of answer. Politicians and businessmen strongly believe that culture is a tool for use in promoting their own political and economic agendas. The politicians want the poet to compose poetry in praise of political power. The businessman wants to be the glorious patron of the arts in order to enhance his good name and reputation. He could do with a sculpture or two at the entrance to his glowing offices. The donor wants the writer to write a play about aids or other diseases, or the inheritance rights of women and children. In other words, all these prominent men and women of power dream of 'using the artist' for their own ends. For them, culture is only a tool to be used and discarded after use. To such people, culture is like a shirt or dress which is thrown away after serving its purpose.

Such perceptions of culture cause me much disquiet and turbulence. I view culture as the totality of what and how human beings have dialogued with nature in order to create civilization. It cannot be just sculpture, music and dance, poetry, novels, paintings. Those are only aspects of culture just as politics and work are aspects of culture.

Culture is how human beings locate themselves in the world: the way a people relate to space, time, movement, food, clothes, governance, love and other relationships. Travel, too, is culture. And death and birth too, are culture. Every society has its own cosmovision, i.e., the way it locates itself in the world. This cosmovision is expressed in so many dynamic ways since human beings are always changing in their way of interacting with other aspects of nature. It is human beings' struggle to perfect their relationship with the world they live in so as to continue to change it along time as they themselves also change.

We dance in order to express that which only the language of dance can express. We sing in order to express that which only song can express. We work in order to express our desire to shape other aspects of nature in so we can change our environment. We tell stories in search of those deep desires and dreams which can only be imagined through imaginary personages in novels, dramas and poetry. We name things in an attempt to control them, to change them for a better present and a future which enhances our dynamic aspirations.

We can now speak of polyculturalism since we have now travelled and met others from distant lands. Such encounters mean we are no longer the same as the time we remained in our own houses without visiting those beyond the hills or across rivers and oceans. I have problems with the term 'multiculturalism.' It simply means sharing the same geographical space with others without any dynamic interactions or dialogues. Polyculturalism, on the other hand, means the dynamic interaction which creates a new

human being who has had multifaceted encounters with others, being influenced by others and also influencing them.

What we generally call 'culture' are simply various human expressions during our interactions with ourselves as well as others. In these interactions, as human beings, we search for new possibilities in life. We dream and express those dreams in our yearning for the past, the present and the future. Culture can then be viewed as the complexity of our expressions in all their forms as we continue to search for this mirage called human destiny.

For example, it is not cultural for a human being to simply live in a cave. It becomes cultural if the inhabitants of a cave begin to paint its walls to make it beautiful. Shelter becomes cultural (architecture) when the inhabitants build beautiful and comfortable houses, fully decorated in certain styles to please the eye as well as the human body's aspiration for comfort. A piece of stone becomes cultural if it is carved into beautiful and comfortable seat.

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Chenjerai Hove called on his fellow Zimbabwean author and ZA Patron Brian Chikwava to join him in a discussion which raised the following issues:

- Responding to Chenjerai's point that artists need to be free to express themselves creatively and that art has to self-analyse, to highlight weaknesses and failings as well as successes, Brian Chikwava responded that writers have to write honestly and be true to themselves.
- Chipso Chung asked about the conflict between 'tradition' (unchanging) and 'culture' as self-expression (constantly changing). Chenjerai replied by emphasizing the need to ask what is culture. Noting that there is also the 'culture of doubt' and the ability to question and provoke debate.
- Propaganda vs. art - to be patriotic means being critical of the ugliness as well as appreciative of the beautiful.
- How do you strike a balance between being honest and self-critical, and selling the product - the 'tourist dream'?
- Culture as commodity - needs 'a new tourism'.

- LUNCH -

Participants were invited to enjoy and network over a traditional Zimbabwean sadza, vegetable and stew lunch prepared and served by members and volunteers of the Zimbabwe Association. Thanks to all those involved.

9. ARTISTS SHARING THEIR STORIES

After lunch participants were invited to work in three groups and before the afternoon's brainstorming session, Wiz invited several artists to share short personal creative and artistic stories as a way of getting people to think of some of the issues that would come up in the brainstorming exercise to follow. People were invited to share the circumstances in which they practice their craft, their aspirations and their particular perspective about the meaning of being a Zimbabwean cultural practitioner, especially in the diaspora

Lucian Msamati: Artistic Director: Tiata Fahodzi

Lucian is currently directing '*The Epic Adventures of Nhamo the Manyika Warrior and his sexy wife Chipo*', a play by Zimbabwean actor turned playwright, Denton Chikura. The play opens at the Tricycle theatre in London in August 2013⁷. Lucian made the following powerful points:

- The biggest crime against Zimbabweans is the one party state insofar as it has stemmed the flow of creativity and diversity.
- 'The only way we'll get somewhere is to ask difficult questions'
- 'The only way to go forward is to embrace the ugly and the difficult'
- Being creative and making a living out of art in diaspora needs money – money is the bottom line!
- Need to have a platform where we can meet and network with each other

Amanda J. Sibanda: Writer / Director – Storyteller

Amanda is completing an MA in filmmaking.⁸ Amanda's presentation shared the following points:

⁷ <http://www.tiatafahodzi.com/productions/the-epic-adventure-of-nhamo-the-manyika-warrior-and-his-sexy-wife-chipo/>

⁸ A sample of Amanda Sibanda's films can be seen via <http://amandajsibanda.wordpress.com/>

Presentation by Amanda J. Sibanda

Men's voices dominate the storytelling world. Women's voices, especially Black, African women, are missing - in the case of Zimbabwe, Ndebele women's voices are very few and far between, almost non-existent. It is very important that women tell their own stories, and have the ability to change the way that they are portrayed - especially in filmmaking. There is a need for Black African women taking charge in front of, and behind the camera. It is important for me to have my voice heard, but to also see myself reflected back to me on the screen through the work of other Black African women.

I went into storytelling after realising the power of having a voice and being in charge of your own story; being able to tell it from your own perspective, and taking charge of your own narrative.

Storytelling also helps preserve history (and histories), and gives nations the ability to share their stories with future generations.

It is important for creative Zimbabweans to collaborate - especially those interested in acting. It is easy for other African nationalities to replace us and 'act' Zimbabwean, but usually they do not do it well, and it is not from a shortage of people willing to be cast in those roles.

© **Amanda J. Sibanda, July 2013**

Bart Wolffe: Playwright/ Poet

Author of 16 published books, leading Zimbabwean playwright, Bart Wolffe, is a committee member of EWI (Exiled Writers Ink) which brings together authors and poets from around the world living in exile because of lack of freedom of expression and censorship in their home countries.

Bart has run drama workshops with refugee children in Croydon and worked with schools in Norfolk lecturing on asylum seekers and refugees and exiles. He won a national poetry competition in the UK last year.

Bart shared a little of the difficulty of being isolated and little known in the diaspora, the expense of London and the indignity of the diasporan life.

- Difficulty getting work in the diaspora which is comparable to the reputation built over years inside Zimbabwe.
- Challenges of being in exile, unable to go back - unable to move forward, having to spend long hours doing manual work to pay the bills.
- Difficulty of not having the resources to practice one's art, he developed the one man show in Zimbabwe ('a can of Coke and a Bun') as a way of having a play that doesn't cost a fortune to put on
- Possibility of finding linkages and creative opportunities/ shared experience with other refugee and asylum seeking groups

Bart also contributed the following piece of poetry which speaks to these experiences:

NO-MAN'S LAND

Pin-prick of dull hope, smallest coal
Clutched in such cold night;
African, the soul, sucks out his prayer
From a tobacco-stub's comfort zone
Whose hands cup a memory about the glow
Of an old fire of home;
But it is not warm in his chill soul
Where this ill of other worlds is now.

- That other place where huts circle
And swells the sweet smell of woodsmoke
Round roasted maize's warm cob in the hand
Is very far away, history, another day,
A perfume of acacia pollen and rain kissing dust
And the lost pounding of a distant drum...

It is something the wind blows through hollow bones,
A dead man's flute, a broken reed,
Gone, in a far-off land, from the dream of another room
With an open-always door unlike here
Whose strangers know not his ways nor he theirs

For no horizon beckons the low of his boyhood cattle
Beneath the blanket stars and other-way moon.

No frog familiars nor fruit bat songs
Fulfil these dead walls where wild buffalo-horns bellow
Their electrical blaze of London or beyond.

Understand how simply he wishes,
How he wishes without words,
Without his own tongue even,
How he only wishes he could go home

But there is no now return to the life-joy stolen
And he knows no here belonging
Neither beckoning back.

Instead he cramps, coughs, gasps his last straw
Clutching for ancestors in a cancer of limbo
In the country we all call - No-Man's Land.

© **Bart Wolfe**

10. OPEN DISCUSSION

- What about working in the vernacular, some people's children are not even able to speak in the vernacular
- If children are unable to speak in the vernacular, that does not mean they are not Zimbabwean
- What is culture - the need to keep examining what it is. Culture is not static, it is living and breathing.
- So many stories, so many Zimbabweans, so many Zimbabwean cultures, need to respect the diversity, to reflect that diversity and to celebrate it
- We need to train not only creative artists such as filmmakers but there is also a whole host of skills, administrative skills, supportive skills that we need to encourage Zimbabweans to take up. The artistic process is a collective effort which needs a range of different talents
- There is need to market and package the particular identity of Zimbabweans, how can we best harness our potential?
- When the arts and entertainment industry are looking for a Southern African they can't seem to find them, and often fall back on Nigerians and Ghanaians who don't sound like Zimbabweans! A recent radio production of *'The No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency'* used West African voices and sounded quite wrong.

- It is novel to have this platform for artists to come together – this is a first and we should build on it.

11. BRAIN-STORMING ON DREAMS, OPPORTUNITIES, OBSTACLES AND ROLES

Margaret Ling facilitated this working session in which participants broke into three groups and working at first individually, and then as a group to answer a variety of questions about dreams opportunities obstacles and roles. They explored the following topics, noting their thoughts on post-it notes which were displayed on flip charts and pinned up for all to see. Each group provided brief summaries of the points made, which were as follows:

Question 1

What are your dreams for the cultural sector in Zimbabwe?

Individual answers from members of the three groups were:

- Vibrant and international
- Youth clubs for young people to explore different art forms
- Censorship laws must change
- Money!
- Self Expression
- A blank sheet...
- A viable, vibrant, competitive and creative entertainment industry
- Diversity culturally in terms of race, gender, sexuality
- Freedom of expression, quality and merit to prevail over political correctness
- Inclusive and diverse
- Cultural support for indigenous cultural forms - supporting dynamic growth
- Engagement of local Councils
- Support for local and existing community centres
- Complete freedom of expression and association for all to express their innermost.
- Cultural linkage with other Commonwealth countries
- Diversity of economic cultural centres
- Independence from NGO's
- Regeneration through culture
- 'Voluntary' sector development
- Effective financial management of limited resources
- Artists as Administrators
- A culture of entrepreneurship

- To see the success stories celebrated nationally and in the highest camps and authority
- Freedom of expression
- Being able to express ourselves
- A place where people can make different works, they don't all have to be the same.
- A place where people can be critical without long term ill-feelings
- Real freedom of expression
- Repeal of laws like AIPPA (Access to Information & Protection of Privacy Act) which are bad for art and culture
- Laws friendly to arts and culture
- I hope the arts and entertainment reach the rural areas
- Diversity
- Sharing regularly
- Meeting with big names
- To see culture practiced with young and old
- Real freedom of expression

Question 2

What are the opportunities back in Zimbabwe today for you as an Artist in the diaspora?

Individual answers from members of the three groups were:

- Publish all the books which annoy politicians
- A familiar cultural background
- Film Production
- Documenting history/tribes/traditions
- Unique experience, unique to Zimbabwe
- Encourage teenagers to become youth counsellors
- Communicate by good demonstration
- Most of my published work is free to download for those in Zimbabwe
- To have my books and plays read and seen and if I had a passport, to possibly share my evolution of the past 10 years in this country.
- Working with groups, schools, communities – mentoring and resourcing
- To share with fellow Zimbabweans those skills I acquired as an artist in the diaspora
- To write books for the school curriculum
- Slim to zero
- They do not exist
- Maybe if the economy improves they will be more available

- Provisions and financial support from a trusted company needed to buy equipment
- Stand up for what you believe
- No connections
- Laughable

Question 3

What practical steps are needed to make your dreams happen?

Individual answers from members of the three groups were:

- Networking with other Zimbabwean artists all over the world
- Finances
- Safe space to create
- Talent recognition and promotion
- Make sure play becomes work for children from kindergarten
- To look for funding to help the homeless
- Repeal repressive laws
- Funding
- Cultural fund independent of government
- Education
- To assist young people to build their future by playing football
- To visit and look for funding to help old people
- Identify sources of money and resources that can make exchanges possible
- Listening to what people in Zimbabwe want and need
- More exchanges between Zimbabwe cultural workers and diaspora leading to cross fertilisation of ideas and less laager mentality.
- Raise funding for young artists who are only coming into the industry to ensure continuity of arts and culture.
- Institutions prepared to provide training opportunities
- Influence Government to respect and cherish freedom of expression
- Identify experiences of other countries with that of the diaspora. Can we learn from them, can they show us what worked?
- Corporate sponsors
- More training and exchanges with local authorities and planners
- To have the recognition and audience that allows my work marketable and my voice to be wanted
- Clear and proper channels of communicating with the National Arts Council
- What book and library schemes already exist re sending books to Zimbabwe?
- Identify existing resources, can they be built on, can they be added to?
- Need resources, modern equipment, explore new ideas

- Participate
- Status
- Need resources, modern equipment,
- Explore new ideas
- Stand up for what you believe
- Learn from experience
- Be confident
- Be strong
- Need to be provided security and stability to allow time to create
- Be creative/ be practical
- Need to be united and work together
- Learn new things
- Integrate
- Accept change as positive

Question 4

What are the barriers for you as an artist in returning to Zimbabwe?

Individual answers to this question from members of the three groups were

- Restrictions in freedom of speech
- I have no Zim passport
- Funding
- Limited market
- Safe space to express
- Money!
- Immigration Issues!
- Political Issues
- Relevance
- Value.
- Access to education/training/equipment.
- I gave up my life in Zimbabwe to begin again. I am now too tired, old and prefer my electronic liaison now.
- Economic validation
- Economic limitations
- Life has moved on - people you know are gone - your support structures have gone.
- Freedom of expression problems.
- Difficult to speak freely.
- Giving up my secure residence in the UK for perhaps unknown future

- Economic and political security – no passport, no going back
- Economic problems – if no one able to buy what you make then how do you live?
- Fear
- Market is slim due to current difficulties
- Lack of connections in the field
- No funding for arts and no freedom of expression
- Out of touch with the Zimbabwe fabric
- Funding
- Lack of skill

Question 5

What are the practical steps needed to transform the cultural sector in Zimbabwe

Collective answers from each of the three groups were:

- Increasing access to culture urban/rural e.g. bioscope
- Cultural ‘revolution’ – art appreciation, tradition
- State funded purchase of indigenously produced work – publishing
- Linking art and education - the practicalities of art
- Privatisation
- Freedom of expression
- Archiving – the importance of preserving culture as a means of enabling dialogue
- Understanding the respective agendas
- Lobbying of local councils to promote cultural events and improve infrastructure
- Opening up the political airways
- Freedom of expression
- Regeneration of infrastructure for cultural events in communities
- Support by the government funding cultural education
- Single Ministry responsible for Art and Culture
- Repeal legislation that suppresses freedom of expression
- Promote Art and Culture in the rural areas e.g. mobile cinemas, mobile libraries, story tellers etc

Question 6

What is the diaspora’s role in making your dreams happen?

Collective answers from each of the three groups were:

- Exposure to different ideas/ arenas of expression
- We should stop being refugees
- Acknowledge we are citizens of many
- Creating platforms for exchange
- Skills Exchange!
- Participate in raising funds for arts and culture
- Establish associations for art education and appreciation
- Access to education/information/creation of an audience
- Autonomous arts management
- Share my experience and learn more from Zimbabwe
- Fundraise on behalf of those artists who are marginalised back home
- Equal exchange of skills
- The diaspora is not exclusive. Many artists/writers from many countries create opportunity for sharing. Zimbabwe is too self-inclusive to listen.
- Providing support, expertise and funding
- Community to community links
- Diaspora needs to get more organised, collaborative working can happen if people are organised.
- Cultural exchange to be culturally aware or sensitive
- Sharing skills and resources to build diaspora platform.
- Providing diaspora opportunities and platforms for artists in diaspora from Zimbabwe
- Contribution financially
- To network with other artists in the diaspora and Zimbabwe
- Provide opportunities
- To provide networking opportunities
- Bring new ideas and technological know-how

Question 7

What is the role of the diaspora in transforming the cultural sector in Zimbabwe?

Collective answers from each of the three groups were:

- Economics/Fiscal contribution
- Exerting a progressive influence
- Skills training

- Education – donating time/ transferring skills
- Diaspora fund dedicated to supporting artists
- What does the cultural sector refer to – identifying what ‘cultural’ encompasses.
- Art and culture as integral to everyday life
- Sharing examples of success in the diaspora with those artists in Zimbabwe.
- Should look at self sustenance instead of waiting for funding
- Culture cross pollination
- Technical and structural support at grassroots level
- Keep and practice our cultural values no matter where you are especially family unit and societal clubs
- Co-ordinating, collection of resources to Zimbabwe e.g. books, DVDs, CDs, laptops, phones etc.

Question 8

What is the role of the Commonwealth and other Regional and International organisations?

Collective answers from each of the three groups were:

- To provide an international outlet/stage for artists (local and international)
- SADC Scholarships
- Facilitating Exchange Programmes
- Lobbying for Reduction of Restrictions
- Facilitating Cultural Trade
- Commonwealth to influence international organisations to actively promote share of culture.
- Commonwealth or another organisation should look to facilitating an internet portal for the arts within and without Zimbabwe.
- Create an initiative where artists can access funding without long bureaucratic processes.
- Funding cultural activities in Zimbabwe
- Promote fair trade
- Push for freedom of expression
- Promoted events that bring Zimbabwean community together to discuss culture
- Studying
- Promote entrepreneurial skills
- Human rights promotion

12 RECOMMENDATIONS

The brainstorming session brought artists and creative practitioners from across many sectors together in a creative buzz of energy. They helped make the consultation vibrant; openly sharing their dreams, and aspirations, examining the opportunities that exist and the role they might play in contributing to the transformation and re-invigoration of the Zimbabwean creative arts.

Participants were also able to identify and provide ideas and solutions for the challenges and barriers that exist both at a practical and logistical level and in the policy and strategy arenas.

Many wonderful and diverse points and solutions were proposed both by individuals and by groups working together around tables with coloured post-it notes, flip charts and pens. One participant, who had to leave as the working sessions were getting started, wrote with congratulations on what she described as ‘a great event’. She went on to say ‘the talk on Friday was just bubbling when I left and I heard the afternoon was great’.

Many underlined the need for freedom of expression and assembly, others spoke of the need to explore and embrace the diversity that makes up multiple narratives. Others underlined the practical barriers that exist, identifying the need for exchange programmes, for the creation of more platforms from which to share experiences with Zimbabweans ‘at home’.

The need for funding, training and education in the arts and culture sector was another key issue. Many spoke of funding and resource constraints as a real barrier. They made the case that funding, business and donors should be encouraged to view arts and culture as critical to the nation building project, in the healing process, in the re-building and re-energising of Zimbabwe and as a means of people making a sustainable living.

One participant spoke about all the other supportive skills and talents that go to make up the creative arts business. She made the point that Zimbabweans need to be introduced and trained to these supportive roles which can provide a variety of jobs in supporting the arts. Friends from the theatre agreed and provided examples of areas of work that people may not normally even be exposed to, roles as diverse as set design, marketing, administration and finance and many others.

Looking at the role that friends in the Commonwealth and other international and regional bodies might play, participants spoke of the need for exchange programmes. They identified the potential that cultural exchange might play within the Southern African region. They spoke of the need to re-connect with the Zimbabwean diaspora in the region and to tap into the expertise and resources available in the region.

An overwhelming theme that came through was a vision for a Zimbabwe that is diverse, that is tolerant and provides a conducive environment for multiple voices. One proposal

suggested bringing together the contributions gleaned from the visits to Zimbabwe and the diaspora into a book; a project which would help record and share the variety of Zimbabwean experience.

The consultation also affirmed and underlined the potential that cultural expression has in bringing about healing and reconciliation

Another key point was the identification of the need to create a more regular platform for Zimbabwean creative talent to come together. Several participants spoke of the role that websites and social media might play in making this exchange a reality that could be participated in both to make these exchanges begin to happen.

In the policy region, many spoke of the need for artists and creative talent to be supported in Zimbabwe, most picking up and agreeing to the points raised in Chipso Chung's presentation.

13 CONCLUSION

The Arts and Culture consultation with the Zimbabwean diaspora provided a first exploratory platform for Zimbabwean arts and culture practitioners in the UK to come together with friends from the Commonwealth. It provided a space for some of Zimbabwe's finest creative talent in the UK and on the International scene to express their dreams, hopes and concerns for Zimbabwe's cultural future.

The consultation opened a new chapter in the conversation about the policy and strategy needs of the cultural sector inside Zimbabwe. It identified multiple roles that Zimbabweans in the UK diaspora might play in re-engaging and reviving the arts and culture of Zimbabwe. One of the key outcomes of the day was that it provided room for artists and creative talent to share and network, to hear what each other are doing, to show and express their continued desire to 'be Zimbabweans', to explore what it means to 'be Zimbabwean' and to contribute to the development and re-invigoration of Zimbabwe, from wherever they are.

The consultation provided hope for the potential of establishing culture as a key dimension of Zimbabwe's development, both in and outside the country. It focused minds on how attention to many infrastructural, environmental, governance, livelihood, policy and strategic issues that are highlighted here could play a vital role. Arts, culture and crafts in all their many manifestations could and should be critical in helping the wounded nation to examine itself, debate and explore its identity, celebrate its diversity and begin building the fragmented nation afresh with a new story.

This consultation and the rich variety of dreams, hopes and aspirations identified by Zimbabwean creative talent in the diaspora during the brainstorming sessions would seem to point very clearly to the role that arts and culture might play in reconnecting and re-engaging Zimbabweans at home and those who have been in the diaspora who will come with new stories and other experiences to add to the mix. Culture; as Chenjerai Hove reminded us; does not lie still as a display on a museum shelf, but is living, breathing and ever-changing.

Arts and Culture has a huge role to play in enabling the dialogue to take place towards truth healing and reconciliation after a prolonged period of conflict. Cultural and artistic expression has an important role to play in helping Zimbabweans to look at themselves anew. It can to explore narratives that help make sense of the separation, the loss and the pain as well as share the bonds of laughter and reach out the hand of friendship.

On the more practical side, it can provide sustainable livelihoods for people, introduce people to new skills from which business can be made and tap into the rich seams of entrepreneurial skills that Zimbabweans seem to have in abundance.

Chenjerai provided laughter, provoked reaction and reflection on what we mean when we say culture. He reminded us that culture does not sit on a dusty shelf. It cannot be created at the behest of a Minister. Culture, Chenjerai reminded us, is alive. Culture is about change, it lives, it breathes!

The event heard the views of the Zimbabwean diaspora on how to forge closer partnerships and links with arts and culture practitioners in Zimbabwe. What is incumbent now is to pick up the threads and begin to do the work of using culture to make the re-engagement real!

14. SOME WORDS OF THANKS

In making the consultation possible we have many organisations, friends, supporters, volunteers and Zimbabwean artists to thank. In the Commonwealth, which still believes in Zimbabwe, we are immensely grateful to the Commonwealth Foundation for its generous support. Thanks and acknowledgements are also due to the Commonwealth Association of Museums and the Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS) who also chipped in with top-up funding for this event.

A debt of thanks and gratitude go to the Zimbabwe Association staff, Board, members (including in the regional Drop-in Centres) and the many volunteers, and supporters of the Zimbabwe Association. The support and solidarity demonstrated by the Scurrah Wainwright Charitable Trust made the visit to Zimbabwe a reality and opened many new doors and paths to explore.

A further debt of gratitude goes out to the members and friends of the Britain Zimbabwe Society. Their support and encouragement, contacts and links have been invaluable.

The solidarity and support of those in Zimbabwe in the Book Café and Pamberi Trust and many hundreds of organisations and individuals in Zimbabwe who gave their time and energy to both visiting groups was invaluable. They provided much inspiration and insight, were generous with their time and contacts and provided hope that culture can indeed be a powerful means through which we can re-engage.

Finally, the consultation would not have been possible without the wonderful and energetic participation of so many inspirational arts, culture and crafts practitioners, both those who have 'made it' and those who are still aspiring. Many gave freely of their time and their energy. We wish them every success.

Particular thanks go to Chenjerai Hove, Zimbabwe's very own 'national treasure'. His visit from Norway would not have been possible without the support of the International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN) in Norway.

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