

Dunia Moja International School

(Working Title: One World International School)

Draft Proposal
September 23, 2007

By Kitche Magak, PhD
With Kate Gardner and Jack Ogembo, PhD

Mission

To build a creative learning centre where Africans can develop and connect with people from other parts of the world to exchange ideas and co-create new thinking.

Introduction

Dunia Moja International School will be located in the hub of East Africa—Kisumu City on the shores of Lake Victoria in Kenya.

The School is founded on the following principals:

1. An integrated arts-like approach towards all subjects, which is key to developing creative relationships and thinking needed for an increasingly interrelated complex world;
2. Recognition and inspiration of innate intelligence and inventiveness of Africans – this needs to be appreciated and inspired and
3. Enhancement of respectful exchange of worldviews of and mutual generation of new ways of seeing by the African mind and the global mind;

The School

Dunia Moja International School will be designed to develop a new breed of leader—social workers, businesspeople, activists, teachers, politicians, artists—who will take up their calling with new eyes and new possibilities. We are looking to produce creative thinkers who are connected to themselves, their roots, the global community, and to their humanity.

Creativity and exploration will be the soul of the School. The School will consciously try to break the artificial alienating boundaries of traditional educational structures. It will promote interdisciplinary learning—i.e., how math relates to literature, to business, to philosophy, to history, and other disciplines. This will be a multi-track program that offers limitless choices as opposed to funnelling students into predetermined paths.

Further, African traditional knowledge will be integrated with newer technologies. The learning will pay special attention to African society as a complex social, cultural, economic,

creative, ever-changing organism that has both direct and indirect relationships with the rest of the world.

We recognize the significant challenge the School vision presents to existing educational modalities—particularly in a place where formal schooling has historically served colonial and post-colonial authoritarian control and oppression. Although students will receive a high standard of academic training, life skills will be equally as important. Rather than imposing the dominant Western model of passive knowledge acquisition, the School seeks to be a learning environment cooperatively produced by students, teachers and others.

In this kind of transformative cultural/educational activity, the creative and connective languages of art-making—of poetry and storytelling, painting and sculpture, theatre, film, dance and music—become critical tools. Not so that students can produce art (although they will), but so they can find their unique voices, see themselves and others from new vantage points, explore questions not yet asked, imagine new possibilities, build new kinds of kinships.

The practice of creative collaboration is also essential if the School is to fashion a more level playing field where Africans can connect with people from other parts of the world to exchange ideas and co-create new thinking. This kind of non-intimidating platform that has its referral point in Africa does not currently exist—yet is desperately needed if young Africans are to fruitfully interact with an increasingly sophisticated world.

The issue of creating a level playing field is also a serious regional challenge, where women's oppression and ethnic rivalry are major obstacles to development. In our experience, art-making particularly seems to empower young women and facilitate fraternal relationships across ethnic boundaries.

Lastly, expansive thinking that balances freedom and responsibility is much needed in a world where so many seem to be turning to fundamentalism and closing in on themselves.

Rationale

The world, especially the so-called Developed World, has always related and continues to relate to Africa as a charity case, a continent bereft of any innovative ideas that could substantially contribute to its own development in particular and to the development of the world in general. The School is envisaged to directly counter this popular historical fallacy.

The very idea of school is a Western construct that does not adequately respond to the African reality. The Dunia Moja International School is envisioned to fill that gap. For example, dire poverty confines innumerable African children to total illiteracy simply because the school system is by design favourable to the wealthy. Ideas such as universal access to primary education is still a pipedream in a context where getting the next meal is a fulltime occupation. The School, therefore, will be a laboratory for others to study and learn from and possibly emulate. It is hoped that the School will collaborate with scholars from other parts of world and like-minded institutions and help break the stereotypical view of Africa as simply a place of poverty and misery.

Students

The School will board students 10 to 17 years of age from throughout the East African region (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi) as follows:

1. Fees paying students whose parents/guardians are seeking all-round top-notch education with a human face;
2. Bright students from poor backgrounds who would normally be locked out of high quality education by prohibitive fees and
3. Special admission for girls who are socio-culturally marginalised.

The School will seek sponsorship for non-paying students. Part of this scholarship will be realised from the sliding scale fees structure that will be adopted.

Teachers

The School will recruit teachers who combine excellence with dedication to the vision of the School. We currently have three Kenyan university lecturers on board with this idea. This will be a huge advantage in hiring, because they are in touch with numerous teachers who would fit the bill.

The School also envisages inviting guest teachers from variety of disciplines from other countries. It is our hope that these teachers will be volunteers who have a passion for developing strong community beyond their national borders.

Obviously all faculty and staff—who, for the most part, have been taught the same educational theory and practice we are seeking to challenge—will themselves need ongoing support and training to undertake this experimental endeavour. Here too, we will employ the School's basic principals of creative pedagogy, building on innate strengths, and enhancing relationships between a diversity of people.

Given the overt oppression of African women and the fact that many female students are permanently scarred or destroyed by routine sexual abuse from male teachers, special attention will be given to the issue of gender oppression.

Funding and Resources

In the long term, we believe that the School can be self-sustaining, based on student fees, strong alumni support and other forms of investment including a construction, on campus, of a well-equipped training (conferencing) centre for hire.

In the meantime, significant outside funding will be required to get the School up and running. We are right now, therefore, looking for partners—individuals and organizations—who wish to invest resources and energy into the development and manifestation of this vision.

Background

The School concept builds on the relationships and methods developed during the *BrooKenya!* Project (www.brookenya.org). *BrooKenya!* was an intercontinental artistic experiment that brought together over 150 residents of Kisumu, Kenya; Brooklyn, USA; and Lima, Peru. This was an artistic journey that mobilised people from extremely diverse backgrounds to produce a grassroots cross-cultural soap opera inspired by their lives and imaginations that touched and continues to touch the lives of thousands of people around the world.

At the heart of the *BrooKenya!* Project and the School is the relationship between Dr. Kitche Magak of Kenya and Kate Gardner of the United States, who met at a conference in 2001. Dr. Magak is an educator and the Executive Director of Integrated Community Health Services, a non-profit organisation in Kisumu. Ms. Gardner is principal of WorldEnsemble, a studio for creative human interaction, in New York City.

Wanting to build on their six years of friendship and successful collaboration, they teamed up with a *BrooKenya!* contributor and close colleague of Dr. Magak, Dr. Jack Ogembo, educator and development consultant. Together they came up with the idea of a model school that would carry forward the spirit of *BrooKenya!* Dr. Magak is the proposed executive director and Mr. Ogembo, programme director. Ms. Gardner is serving as a technical advisor.

Conclusion

The initiating team is committed to building a sustainable platform in Africa that can support the development of ongoing, mutually beneficial, cross-cultural relationships. It is our aim to find the partners needed to concretize and make this vision a reality, so that the School will open its doors to the first students within the next two years.

END