



A PROJECT OF THE
UNIVERSITY WOMEN'S
ASSOCIATION

**University of Nigeria,
Nsukka, Nigeria.**

*By reading we learn,
By knowledge we serve*

NEWSLETTER

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In This Issue

This issue of the Newsletter begins with events opening the 2009/2010 session: the reception of our new patron, Barr. (Mrs.) Nwanneka Okolo; her first Christmas party for children; our annual Christmas caroling; and the Mirror the Master art competition. Next come reports of two very successful long vacation programmes held in 2009 and 2010 and workshops offered by our student partners in AIESEC. Finally Chiazio Igboeli reports on books discussed by the Women's Book Club. Happy reading!

Reception for Barr. (Mrs) Nwanneka Okolo, Our New Patron

The Children's Centre Committee joined hands with the newly created Interim UWA Executive to organize a well-attended welcome party for our Patron, Barr. (Mrs.) Nwanneka Okolo, wife of the Vice-Chancellor on November 20, 2009. Features included the Children's Centre song composed by Mrs. Theresa Mbakamma and sung by children from the University School and a drama written by Mrs. Ngozi Osadebe highlighting the Centre's sanitary situation. A welcome address that encapsulated the needs and desires of the Children's Centre and appealed for the Patron's assistance in resuscitating UWA was read by the Vice-Chairman of the Interim UWA Executive, Ms. Terri Emezi. Responding, the Patron commended the efforts of the women in developing the Children's Centre project and pledged her support in moving the project and association forward.

Children's Christmas Party

The Children's Centre field was the venue of a Christmas party hosted for children by the wife of the Vice-Chancellor, Barr. (Mrs.) Nwanneka Okolo. Events included an address by the Patron, dramatization of the Christmas story, songs and miming, dancing with Teddy Bear, and distribution of food and presents.

Christmas Carolling, 2009

Children of the Centre went caroling in December 2009 and realized donations of N100,770. These came from Margaret Cartwright/Ikejiani/Fulton East (N25,020); Margaret Cartwright/Ikejiani/Fulton West with Elias Ave. (N24,150); Odim zone (N12,400); Eze Opi/Alvan Loving (N10,000); and Mbonu Ojike/Murtala Mohammed zone (N29,200).

Mirror the Master Art Competition

This national children's art competition, organized by former staff child Chima Ezeilo of Kambani Arts and sponsored by Access Bank, took place in four locations—Osogbo, Benin, Nsukka and Zaria, with the finals in Lagos —between October 2009 and March 2010. The Nsukka competition in January was scheduled to hold at the Children's Centre but later took

place in Central School I. Fourteen schools, including the University School and eleven of our cooperating public primary schools, participated in the competition. John Cross Omeke of Model School II won first prize both in Nsukka and later in the national competition and was awarded a trip to London to view Ben Enwonwu's art. Other Nsukka winners were Oluchuku Okorie of the University School in 2nd place, and Ifeanyi Agbo of Township Primary School I in 3rd place.

AIESEC African Young Entrepreneurs Projects YES! And ASK

The international students' organization AIESEC has continued to be a good partner, taking part in all major Children's Centre activities. In 2009 they initiated and executed Africa YES, a 4-week training aimed at developing entrepreneurial skills. Sixty participants were selected from over 200 youth attending the opening ceremony on July 15. In addition to a second Africa YES programme in 2010, AIESEC organized ASK, an education program for prevention of HIV/AIDS. The programmes were assisted by several foreign student interns, for whom the Children's Centre was able to secure a permanent accommodation in the Postgraduate Hall. We are looking forward to a day when UNN students will partake in internship programs overseas. Harry, the current AIESEC Coach, needs to be commended for the work he is doing both for AIESEC and for the Children's Centre. Our congratulations go to AIESEC for these noteworthy and most successful initiatives.

Long Vacation Programs

The Centre mounted very successful long vacation programs in 2009 and 2010. An innovation of the two programs was the organization of separate activities for each age group. Both were organized under the direction of Margaret Ngwuchukwu, whose reports follow.

2009 Long Vacation Program

The 2009 program, held from August 17-31, 2009, was organized by a sub-committee made up of Margaret Ngwuchukwu, Ngozi Osadebe, Ezinne Njoku and Amaka Ejikeme. One hundred and fifty-five (155) children registered for activities organized by age for 1-3, 4-6, 7-9 and 10-15 years. The activities went very well as each age range had a resource person every day teaching of the different programmes marshaled out for them. For instance, children ages 1-3 years played with toys and enjoyed puppet and game shows, while the age range 4-6 had computer training, colour mixing, making of toy cars, spelling bee and excursions.

The excursions took place in the pharmaceutical laboratory and the fire service. The head of pharmaceutical department and his team took the children round the laboratories, explaining the equipment, what it was used for and even how drugs were made. With this many of the children may be inspired to become pharmacists in the future. The visit to the fire service was also an eye opener for children as they were taught the causes of fire disaster and the dangers of playing with matches or electricity. The children were also shown how fire is put out, the equipment used and their functions. To crown it all, they were given the fire service number to give to their parents to call the fire service in case of any fire disaster.

A wonderful talk show on HIV/AIDS was given by the students of AIESEC while Prof. Ebele Maduwesi gave one on human development for older children. Talks were given to age range 7-9 on morning duties and personal hygiene. The children had a debate on whether handsets use should be encouraged among children. They had a play and miming which was showcased at the closing ceremony. Their crafts, such as babies' dresses sewn by children, hair bands, hats, and toy cars were also displayed at the closing ceremony.



Singing the Children's Centre story at Reception for Patron Barr. (Mrs.) Nwanneka Okolo



Mirror the Master Art Competition
From left -2nd place, 1st place, 3rd place



Patron Nwanneka Okolo
addressing children

Children's Christmas Party 2009



Teddy and children dancing



Shepherds in Christmas story

2010 Long Vacation Program

The 2010 Children's Centre long vacation program was held from August 27th to September 4th. The holiday program was meant to ensure all round development of children, enabling them to learn other things apart from normal classroom work so as to discover their talents and be useful to themselves and to the society. It targeted different age groups from 1 to 15 years. The program was a success as 149 children registered, comprising 61 children ages 1-9 years and 88 children 10-15 years. The program was organized by a committee comprising of Margaret Ngwuchukwu (chair), Harry of AIESEC, and Elizabeth Babarinde; Ms. Terri Emezi, Vice-Chair of the Committee, gave her motherly support. Members of AIESEC, staff of Library and Information Science and community members served as resource persons.

Activities for the different age groups included: for 1-3 years, toy playing, nursery rhymes, learning numbers, games, caring with dolls, playhouse, story hour; for 4-6 years, card making, drawing, computer basics, grooming, number building, simple map reading, paper arts, and story hour with picture books; for 7-9 years, photography, bead making, computer training, cookery, hair dressing, stitching and crocheting, miming, handkerchief making, soya milk making, games like scrabble and football, powdered soap making, talk on HIV/AIDS, personal hygiene, nature and science study, housekeeping, use of electrical appliances; and for 10-15 years, crocheting, bead making, cookery, baking, powdered soap making football, table tennis, debate, soya milk making, talk shows, goal setting, and personal development. The children were very enthusiastic as they learned arts and crafts which they would not get from classroom work.

Children also went on excursions to strategic places of interest. Ages 1-6 visited the Motherless Babies Home in Nsukka; this was meant to teach them love and caring. Ages 4-9 visited the zoo and Lion Water, where the children learned the stages in processing drinkable water. Ages 10-15 visited the space centre, where the children were welcomed in a grand way and given explanations of the various sections. Finally, they had an excursion to the Vet Hill; this enabled them to appreciate nature at its fullest. (*Report by Margaret Ngwuchukwu*)

Prof. Judith D. C. Osuala Collection on Women and Development

The Children's Centre recently opened a memorial collection on Women and Development in honour of our late member, Prof. Judith D. C. Osuala. Judy suggested the idea of the collection and offered her materials as a beginning shortly before her death in 2006. A professor of adult education and community development, Judy had an extensive collection of journals, reports and conference papers on women's studies, education, health, and sustainable development that is now available to library users.

Women's Book Club 2010

The book club read three collections of short stories by African authors, one Ugandan and two Nigerian. Here is a synopsis of the discussions as recorded by Chiazo Igboeli.

***Tropical Fish: Tales from Entebbe*, by Doreen Baingana** (Cassava Republic) is a set of interlocked stories about three sisters in Entebbe, Uganda experiencing their adolescent and early adult years. The book seems to have been written for adolescents and young adults and to reflect their lives and concerns. Some aspects were reminiscent of adolescent life in Nigeria, for instance, boarding school life with the food (beans with weevils) and paucity of male teachers in girls' schools. Life in Entebbe for the Ugandans appeared very much westernized. The three sisters had no experience of village life, having been born and bred in Entebbe and having never visited their village. The HIV/AIDS pandemic was well reflected

in the book. The oldest sister, Rose, contracted HIV/AIDS and died. From her letter to David it was evident that the pandemic was ravaging Uganda at that time. However, as a member observed, Uganda has done very well in containing HIV/AIDS. Patti, another sister, had a religious conversion in secondary school. She seems not to have had further education and appeared content to putter around and manage her vegetable garden.

The main focus was on Christine, who pursued further education and moved to the USA. Christine's experience in Los Angeles was a typical African immigrant experience in the USA—the sterility of the environment and the loneliness. African immigrants try to cope by having regular get-togethers within their national, state, and town groups. Christine, unable to cope with life in the USA decided to go home. But she had forgotten how bad home could be. Don't we all have the tendency to forget the negatives about home when we are away from it? Christine was in for a shock when she got back to Uganda: she met dilapidation, poor working conditions, poor facilities, etc. Her mother expected her to marry but she appeared not to be keen, and not to be bothered about spinsterhood. This attitude seems to be a trend among educated females in Africa. Christine may have subliminally been influenced by her mother's marital experience of being married to a drunk. Christine who had been captivated by her mother's green stones found in later years that the stones had lost their luster. They had faded even as the love in her parents' marriage seemed to have faded.

***Say You're One of Them*, by Uwem Akpan** (Little, Brown & Company, 2009), a collection of five short stories by Nigerian Jesuit priest Uwem Akpan illuminates lives of children facing very difficult circumstances in Nigeria and East African countries.

An Ex-Mas Feast

The opening story portrays a desperately poor family living on the street in Nairobi, Kenya. The author's emphasis in the story appeared to be on absolute deprivation; there appeared to be no escape route from abject poverty for the family in the story. The 12-year-old Maisha saw prostitution as the only possible escape route and decided to leave home and become a professional prostitute. She hated her parents for being unable to send her to school because of their poverty. A depressing story! Maisha's 8-year-old brother refused to be sponsored in school from the proceeds of prostitution and ran away from home to become a street child. The 10-year-old sister was already being coached by Maisha on how to relate to men and had already had a man. Club members were aware of street children, but street families were a new phenomenon which was rather difficult to accept. How could a family live on the streets? Possibly the collapse of the extended family structure in modern African countries may be responsible for the phenomenon of street children and street families. We have street children in Nigeria; do we have street families?

Fattening for Gabon

In this story two young Nigerian children, whose parents are dying of AIDS, are handed over to the care of their uncle in another town. Some members found this story very painful; a man deceiving his 10-year-old nephew Kotchipa and 5-year-old niece Yewa, planning to sell them into slavery where they could possibly be used as child prostitutes. Could Fofu's poverty justify such deception and wickedness? Fofu was not totally depraved; he still had a conscience and decided not to continue with the plan. He planned to run away with the children back to their village, having explained everything to Kotchipa. He was killed as they attempted the escape. Kotchipa was able to escape but Yewa, who was kept in the dark about the deception, was taken into slavery.

What Language Is That?

The story is simple and quite realistic. There was faith-related trouble in an Ethiopian city, after which the parents told the storyteller, a 6-year-old Christian girl, and her best friend Selam, a Muslim girl, to stop relating to each other. Neither girl was happy about this and they soon discovered a new language of communication without words—miming. Since they lived across the street from each other, they could communicate through mimes when their mothers were not watching.

Luxurious Hearses

The second longest story in the book was found to be most interesting and compelling. It concerned a Muslim boy in northern Nigeria, who, rejected by his own people, attempted to flee south to find his Christian father's family. He finds himself hiding his identity on a bus of Christian refugees trying to escape religious violence in the North. The complete and easy changeability of the people in the bus was striking and it did not show the people to advantage. However, if we consider that these people had just been through some horrendous experiences and great tribulations and have not escaped from enemy territory, then we can begin to appreciate the volatility of their emotions. The 16-year-old Muslim boy, Jibril died fulfilled; he was true to himself. He had been prepared for the ordeal that awaited him and he faced death boldly. The instant justice was typical of what happens in Nigerian cities.

My Parents' Bedroom

This was possibly the longest story in the book, powerfully compelling to some, and the most terrible of the stories to others. Set in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide, the story concerns a family caught in the middle, with a Hutu husband and Tutsi wife. Events are viewed through the eyes of their 9-year-old daughter Monique, who sees her loving family torn apart by inter-ethnic hatred and her father forced to kill his own wife. It was not the most depressing of the stories, however, because of Maman's bravery; she willingly encouraged her husband to kill her to ensure that her husband, her daughter Monique and her little son were spared. Monique and her little brother, who had been brought up with much love and in a lovely home suddenly became fugitives after witnessing the killing of their Maman. Monique suddenly became her brother's caretaker and had to hide from Maman's people who were on a mission of revenge. The vengeful Tutsis unwittingly killed their own people hiding in the ceiling of Papa and Maman's house when they set the house on fire.

***Nights of the Creaking Bed*, by Toni Kan (Cassava Republic)**

This collection of short stories takes on the harsh realities of Nigerian life, especially among the urban poor. Some members observed that the book was blatantly honest in the stories, which were about social behavior; the author was not judgmental. Some members reacted rather strongly, terming the book pornographic, and wondered why there was so much sex and graphic detail in the first few stories. Other members questioned the "fuss" about sex; the author was just telling it as it is in society today. And, moreover, children are not ignorant about sex-related issues. Following are discussions of four stories.

Nights of the Creaking Bed

A woman who was abandoned by her husband entered into a relationship with a married man in order to have support for herself and her sons. The relationship, which was not hidden from the sons or from the neighbors, ended in the death of the man on the woman's bed, possibly during sexual intercourse. Following this, the woman and her sons were ridiculed and had to find another accommodation. This story shows how adult behavior could

negatively impact children's lives. The question some members asked was, "Where was the extended family? Why didn't the extended family support the woman and her two sons?"

Broda Sonnie

The story, recounted by a schoolchild living with his abandoned mother and other tenants in a Lagos yard, concerned a neighbor, Sonnie, a jolly bus conductor and the only son of his widowed mother. The storyteller helped him write love letters to his many girlfriends. Sonnie's special girl was Risi, a Muslim neighbor from a relatively well-off family. After a pilgrimage to Mecca her brother Mufu began cutting himself off from his Christian neighbors, calling Sonnie and others "Christian infidels." Mufu so strongly resented the budding relationship between Sonnie and Risi that he and some associates stormed Sonnie's quarters and killed him while his mother, Risi, and neighbors watched.

This story is about religious issues which the Nigerian government appears unable to deal with. There was a long discussion of the cultural and religious conflicts that have become incessant in Nigeria. In these conflicts culture and religion are so tightly interwoven that it is not easy to know how to deal with them. The recent crises in Jos were cited; some Nigerians say that the conflict is religious while others argue that it is cultural. Whichever it is, the governments have not been able to handle conflicts and punish the perpetrators.

Ahmed

Ahmed, a shepherd boy, had an older brother Yinusa, a truck driver who told exaggerated stories about life in the big city. Ahmed was captivated and kept begging their widowed mother to allow him to go with Yinusa to Lagos. Mother refused because she feared that he would not return home alive if he went to the city. Ahmed continued to beg and eventually their mother agreed. Ahmed was disappointed with some aspects of the big city, but he was totally captivated by the tall buildings, the number of cars on the streets, the pedestrian bridges. As they drove into Lagos, the driver's mate used a piece of wood to move dangling electric cables out of the way. Ahmed, in ignorance, tried to move a cable with his bare hands and was electrocuted. He saw Lagos and died; thus, his mother's fears came true.

My Perfect Life

Sylvia, a 20-year-old final year College of Education student from Abraka, met Seun, a Yoruba man who worked and lived in Warri. Within three weeks of their meeting, Sylvia and Seun were madly in love and Seun proposed to Sylvia. However, Sylvia's father refused to allow his first daughter to marry a Yoruba man because of what his people did to his uncle after the war. Although Seun pleaded with Sylvia to defy her father and elope, she was afraid and fell ill enough to be hospitalized. Upon discharge she found that Seun was gone.

Years later at 41, Sylvia was married to a kind, loving and gentle man, had two children, a good job and home. But when she met Seun at a supermarket, the truncated love relationship was instantly renewed. Happiness and excitement were most important to Sylvia; she was not content to be ordinary like other women and remain in a marriage that was devoid of sexual excitement and love. She was tempted by Seun's proposal that she leave her husband and children and travel with him to America. He pleaded that they should not miss this opportunity as they had missed the first one. Though the ending is ambiguous, Sylvia's own happiness seemed more important to her than that of her husband and children and she appeared to some members to have made up her mind to leave her family.

Reported by Chiazio Igboeli, Convener