



# International Association of African Educators

IAAE Newsletter, Spring 2014

March, a month designated as women's month, is upon us. On March 8<sup>th</sup> the world will be celebrating International Women's Day. On this day and during this month we collectively reflect on advancements we have made a toward gender equity and the road ahead of us. Africans on the continents and in diaspora should be proud that several African countries are leading the world in execution of the ideal of having equal representation in government. "Rwanda and Burundi lead the continent and indeed the world with over 50% of women in the parliament. Senegal and Swaziland have not lagged far behind with almost 40% of women in the parliament." Liberia and Malawi have women as presidents and South Africa has had its own woman vice president. Indeed the leader of the United Nations' global agenda of advancement of women and girls is an African. Nonetheless, there is still work to be done to gain economic and social equity for women in the African continent. In this issue, the founders share their professional advancements.

Editor: Shirley Mthethwa-Sommers

## Message from Founder and President Dr. Omiunota Ukpokodu

Let me begin by wishing you a Happy New Year! I hope you were able to make great New Year resolutions, and that becoming a member of IAAE was one of them.

As I write this message, I feel a sense of gratitude for the continued collaboration and support from the IAAE board of directors. As we all know, establishing a new organization can be demanding and a daunting task. Fortunately, I am grateful to the board of directors for their support, unwavering commitment, and enthusiasm that have sustained the organization. So thank you board members for all your hard work! Also, I feel a great sense of encouragement and gratefulness for several of you, both in the Diaspora and in the homeland, who have communicated to express their appreciation for the formation of IAAE and pledged their support. Thank you! I look forward to your active involvement and leadership in the organization. I believe that, with your active involvement and leadership, IAAE will emerge and become the premier organization we

envisioned. I am excited about the opportunities and possibilities that IAAE presents for us to live and reach the full measure of our humanity by making a difference as we work to ensure equity and social justice for ourselves, our brothers and sisters, here in the Diaspora and in the homeland.

Also, as we welcome and celebrate the New Year with all the hope, opportunities and possibilities that are before us, I would like for us to remember our great hero, Madiba Nelson Mandela, former president of South Africa, on his passing. Madiba Nelson Mandela lived and symbolized for us hope, courage, healing, reconciliation, transformation, sacrifice, and service to humanity. He left us a legacy that we must preserve. I think the best way we can celebrate his passing and legacy is to walk the “Long Walk” he walked—struggle for social justice. I believe IAAE is better positioned to embrace this walk and to ensure educational and social justice for all Africans and the transformation of their communities. In the words of our hero, Nelson Mandela, “Education is the most important weapon to change the world.”

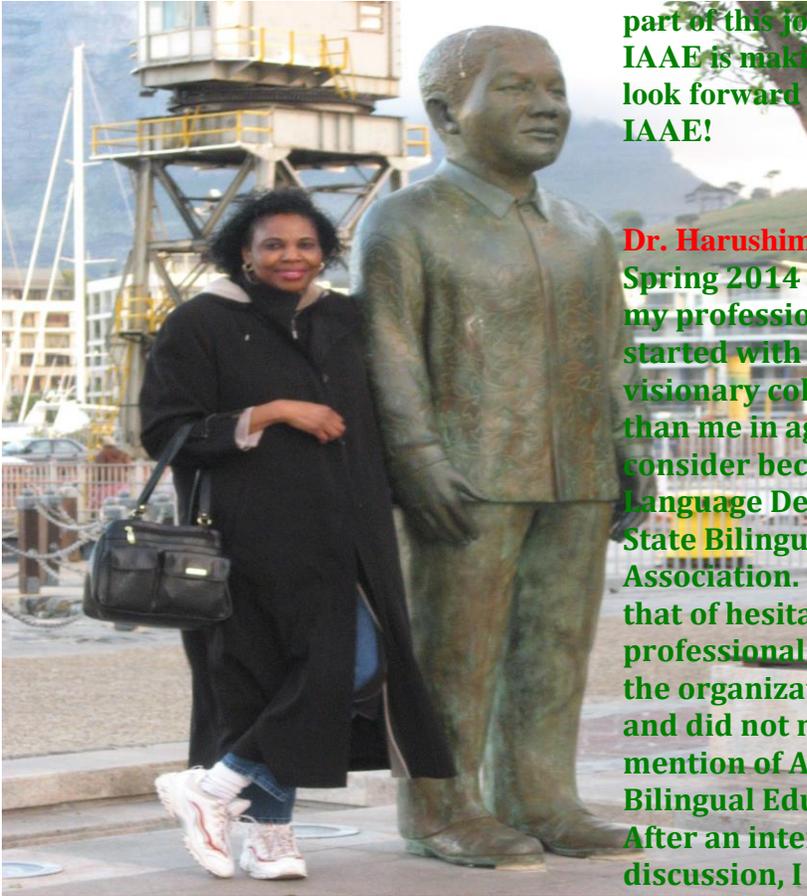
Madiba Nelson Mandela was a beacon of hope to the world. A few years ago I had the privilege to visit South Africa but did not get the opportunity to meet him. The closest I got to him was his statue.

Now I am pleased to share with you that the IAAE board is working hard to accomplish two of its urgent goals—membership and inauguration of IAAE.

**Board Membership:** I am excited to report that three members joined the

IAAE board this spring. We welcomed Dr. Lewis Boahene, Penn State University, Dr. Shirley Sommers, Nazareth College, and Ms. Mercy Agyepong, University of Wisconsin.

**Membership:** I would like to appeal to you to join IAAE if you have not already done so. We need a critical mass in order to be able to accomplish our goals. Several of you have emailed to express difficulty with the online membership subscription and payment options. I am pleased to let you know that this has been resolved. IAAE needs you to join and to come help lead and grow the organization. As I mentioned in my message in the inaugural newsletter, posted last fall, IAAE will need new members to fill new leadership positions in the not distant future. According to IAAE’s bylaws, board members must be in



part of this journey and history that IAAE is making. Thank you and I look forward to welcoming you to IAAE!

**Dr. Harushimana**

Spring 2014 was full of surprises in my professional history. It all started with a surprise call from a visionary colleague, much younger than me in age, asking me if I would consider becoming an African Language Delegate for New York State Bilingual Educators Association. My first response was that of hesitation. As a TESOL professional, I had been following the organization's history closely and did not remember seeing any mention of African immigrants in Bilingual Education literature. After an intense and honest discussion, I realized that I just had the opportunity to be the change I wanted to see in the world, an advocate for the visibility, well-being and equal education opportunity for African immigrant children and youth in US schools. After a moment of deliberation, with no coercion involved, I gladly accepted the responsibility and am glad I did.

Another double-epiphany came when, in the same month, I received two letters of invitation from two colleagues to give guest lectures at their respective institutions: Nazareth College and New Jersey City University (NJCU). In Nazareth, my presentation focused on *The mutilated dreams of refugee students with interrupted schooling (SIFES)*, whereas at NJCU, I shared *Ten principles of academic*

good standing to be eligible to be officers in the organization. In addition, we hope to begin plans for the creation of the organization's scholarly journal. Some of you have expressed interest in helping to bring it to fruition. So I urge you to act and join today. Please go to [www.iaaeorg.org](http://www.iaaeorg.org) and complete your membership subscription. Thank you! IAAE Inauguration: The IAAE board believes it is time to launch the inauguration of the organization. Our goal is to convene an international conference within the next year and half. Again, we need you to join and help us plan for the conference. As you can see, I am excited about these opportunities and possibilities that are coming our way. I hope you will be excited as well and come be a

*writing: Insights from a Non-native English Speaking author and writing instructor.* During the same period, upon the invitation from Lehman Women Studies Program, I gave a lecture, *Not Quitting: The African-born woman response countering racism, genderism and Afrophobia.* The lecture resulted in my being nominated and elected as the general faculty representative to the college's Ad Hoc Committee on the Student Evaluation of Teaching.

I can only hope that this is the beginning and that more opportunities to make a difference lie ahead.

**Dr. Kambutu and Dr. Nganga**

**Cultural immersion transforms participants' image of Africa**

After realizing that many Americans are misinformed about Africa, we developed summer cultural immersion programs to Kenya that are now in their 14<sup>th</sup> year. While the Western countries' use of a deficit lens to contextualize Africa is troubling, we find questions and statements that depict Africa as a country (Africa is a continent) of strange diseases, hunger, poverty, and ethnic conflict/wars ethnocentric, mean-spirited and misinformed. Equally revealing are questions about whether Africa has good marathon runners because they, Africans run after gazelles and other animals for "bush meat." Other stereotypical and embarrassing statements associate Africa with lack of formal

schooling notwithstanding the large number of African students that enroll in American colleges and universities every year. Given the apparent lack of authentic information about Africa in the U.S., we designed summer cultural immersion programs to Kenya.

Cultural immersion has value. For example, although the participants (N=140) in our programs generally had a negative image of Kenya, and by extension Africa before travel, post-travel data showed that they develop informed views as is evident in the following email response, "Kenyan culture is generally warm and inviting. Thus, I would love to live there and experience more of Kenyan cultures." With respect to lack of food, the participants' views were equally changed. Recall that before travel, they were concerned about lack of food. After visiting, however, the participants reported having enough "good food available.... more than we could eat."

Cultural immersion changed the participants' views in other areas as well. For example, before travel, they were concerned about lack of sanitary accommodations such as toilet supplies and hot running water. However, after travel, the participants reported their surprise after experiencing "five star hotels." To that end, one participant conceded, "there was no need for me to bring all my toilet paper." Most telling, however, was a participant's desire to return to Kenya to deconstruct globalization because it was responsible for

some of the challenges Kenya was facing. To that end, he assumed a human right stand arguing that the “world has enough resources for everyone. Thus, as the world becomes a village, it is essential that we all become empathic stewards of its resources.”

Although the initial knowledge that the participants had about Kenya as a place of poverty was confirmed, they were able to understand the complexity of poverty. Thus, instead of blaming Kenyans, for example, they understood poverty from a historical context, slavery and colonization especially. Equally considered were contemporary events such as new-colonialism and globalization. But most revealing was the participants’ report that without the opportunity to participate in our cultural immersion programs, they perhaps would have never understood the link between the said historical and contemporary events with the challenges plaguing Africa. To that end, one participant agreed with Mark Twain that, “Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry and narrow-mindedness.”

**The takeaway:**  
Immersing people in foreign cultures for a prolonged period of time has value. Addressing the issue, Kambutu and Nganga (2008) asserted that when people are immersed in other cultures, they are likely to have experiences that do not conform to existing notions, thus creating essential cultural dissonance. But because cultural

immersion allows people to be physically present in host cultures, without the privilege of escaping to familiar ones, Rodriguez (2000) argued that cultural immersion enables participants to confront and resolve the dissonance experienced. To that end, data from our cultural immersion programs showed that after experiencing Kenyan cultures, participants were able to develop informed image of Kenya, and by extension Africa.

To make cultural immersion meaningful, careful planning is necessary. Indeed, it is planning that separates immersion programs from tourist cultural experiences whose focus is to “wow” or excite and entertain participants (Derman-Sparks, 1998). Because a tourist-based cultural experience is likely to promote comparison (them versus us) of familiar with unfamiliar cultural practices, Williams, (2005) recommended cultural immersion programs that enabled participants to interact with foreign cultures from multicultural perspectives.

Perhaps because of careful planning, data from our cultural immersion programs suggest that although the participants held monolithic views of Africa before travel, after experiencing Kenya, they developed an understanding that Africa is a diverse continent, not a country. We therefore conclude that cultural immersion programs might be ideal strategies in the process of helping people to develop informed images of Africa.

References

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### **Obituary**

**Lembo Mwembo, an esteemed African scholar, departed from this world. He worked tirelessly to instill the values of Ubuntu through his work and actions. He shall be missed!**

### **Invitation for Submissions**

**Education related articles, stories, book or movie reviews which focus a positive gaze on Africa and its people wherever they may be are welcome. You may send your submissions to the editor,**

**Dr. Shirley Mthethwa-Sommers at [iaaenewslettereditor@gmail.com](mailto:iaaenewslettereditor@gmail.com)**