

**TeleDrum: A Model for Developing Cross Cultural  
Edutainment Affecting Behavioral and Social Change  
in Africa and in Appalachia  
(Case Study)**

by

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**TeleDrum: A Model for Developing Cross Cultural Edutainment Affecting  
Behavioral and Social Change in Africa and in Appalachia**

The TeleDrum model presented in this paper chronicles the convergence of East African and Appalachian cultures. It is essentially a case study of the process used in the making of a work of global significance. That being said, there are two significant terms in my introductory remarks that should be operationalized: Culture and Global. Tackling culture first which may be considered the least problematic to wrap ones mind around, is in Mazuri's (1986) purview, quite simple. He states that it is "a system of inter-related values, active enough to influence and condition perception, judgment, communication and behavior in a given society (p. 239). Interrelated values quite aptly apply to the relationship established by West Virginia State Universities (WVSU) Communication Department located in the Appalachian region of the United States and the School of Performing Arts at the University of Dar es Salaam, (UDSM) Tanzania, Africa.

Boyd, a film Professor at WVSU says of the two institutions interrelationship that as West Virginians [we] "just 'get it,' our life is in no way comparable to that of a developing nation like Tanzania – but we understand struggle. We are used to working with minimal resources and living with obstacle" (Wise, 2003, p. 6B). Similarly, the University of Dar es Salaam has a very small budget for its film program and although they have no money ...they have a very productive film program." It may also be said that, both have unique oral traditions, WV has its Hatfield and McCoy story tellers and Tanzania its Griots.

The more problematic term mentioned in the opening statement and one that creates the most confusion is globalization. While social scientists tend to disagree on a maximalist “pervasive international approach” (Friedman, 1999) to a minimalist approach of “bringing together many different societies into one system (Mittleman 1997), Strata (2003) suggests that there are important forms of globalization. He deduced five types which he identifies as economic, environmental, communications, military and culture. As Strata’s taxonomy encompasses two factors indigenous to this account – communication and culture – the far reaching to the narrow dispute over the meaning of “global” ends here. That is to say that this presentation offers an overview of the *convergence* of East African and Appalachian cultures and the process used in the making of a work of global significance aimed at the AID’s pandemic.

TeleDrum which combines “tele” meaning visual and “drum” indicating sound became not only a name but, a concept and mission for WVSU’s film professor and his students’ production company. It was initially established in 1999 to produce informational videos for aid organizations in Africa and to help set up the filmmaking program at UDSM’s new School for the Performing Arts, while teaching filmmaking to African and American students and professionals.

Following upon a Fulbright residency at UDSM in 1998-99 WVSU film Professor Boyd saw the need and the correlation of cultures and subsequently developed a unique request for proposal expressed through African proverb and Western metaphor.

## **RATIONALE**

The underlying principle for the request was offered through two proverbs which stated simply that, *“A good story can only be so if it is told”* and *“The quickest way to solve the mystery of the hunt is to hand the man a spear.* As interpreted through the Fulbright experience Boyd saw that incredible work was being performed by aids organizations throughout Africa but few had time for sounding their own drum. They were too busy doing it! To continue doing good work however, support is needed and thus, one’s drum must reverberate at a fervent pitch. What better way to reach this intensity than through the motion picture for it can capture and condense the essence of an operation in an efficient and entertaining way and is perhaps the most powerful medium for disseminating information and/or facilitating change. As a collaborative art, combining the arts and sciences and investigative skills for analyzing a ‘need’ and designing a structure to address it, the educated filmmaker becomes the conduit for this process by telling a good story. And since storytelling is at the heart of African culture, the filmmaker becomes a storyteller with a louder drum. A good film then, beats like a thousand drums.

## **METHOD**

*Knowledge is like a garden: if it is not cultivated, it cannot be harvested.* Cultivation occurred through the two existing educational programs which partnered to attract students with basic skills, while utilizing and supplementing existing human and technical infrastructure. For example selected advanced students and regional

professionals were brought together in an experiential relationship to “learn while doing.”

With each production, an intern advanced to a higher degree of responsibility ultimately heading their chosen production track i.e., writer/producer /director, camera/sound production, or editing

## **DESIGN**

*Enjoy the beauty of the home without foundation only until the long rains come.*

The foundation for the collaboration was laid in 1994 when WVSU established the Paradise Film Institute to support regional filmmaking by providing resource services, continuing education and foreign exchanges. The production arm developed promotional videos for non-profit goodwill organizations that allowed significant student participation in the production process. Students gained professional experience by being placed in key production roles, under the supervision of a professional in each production area. In each case the client received a quality production at a fraction of the market cost, while contributing to the education of motivated future film professionals. This model was duplicated at UDSM by Boyd during his tenure as a Fulbright scholar in the academic ‘98-‘99 year. The Department of Fine and Performing Arts offered advanced filmmaking and screenwriting courses for the first time in the newly created film studies program.

By the end of the term, the students produced quality programming for receptive organizations, spring boarding them into the local professional arena while providing valuable public service.

## **RESULTS**

*The cattle are as good as the pasture in which it grazes.*

Depending upon the agenda and level of support a single production unit was equipped for as little as \$15,000 utilizing a minimum of a three-person team supervising production and teaching in each production area. Seventeen students developed scripts from the screenwriting course and one was chosen titled DUARA (circle in Swahili) scripted by a young female student. Chosen because it told the story of two love struck schoolmates: Yusufu and Mariam, who oblivious in their love faced the fateful consequences of opening their intimate duara (circle). It succeeded in giving voice to the Ishi campaign which was developed by a Non Governmental Agency to direct attention to pressing issues of health, sexuality, HIV-AIDS, education, and young people in Africa.

## **CONCLUSION**

Boyd ends his creatively crafted request for proposal with the words:  
THE BEGINNING and the proverb: *No journey ends without taking the first step.*

The twenty-seven minute film produced by African and American students, teachers and regional professionals was issued a proclamation in 2002 by West Virginia's Governor Bob Wise as an "example of how ... cultures can come together and embrace differences to better understand each other, while using the art of filmmaking to create programs of international significance." The proclamation further states that "TeleDrum puts West Virginians at the forefront of a global community, dedicated to making the world a better place through peaceful coexistence."

At the 46<sup>th</sup> Annual African Studies Association Conference, DUARA was granted the Francois Manchuelle Award for bringing attention to Africa in West Virginia's Appalachian community, public schools and colleges. It also received an honorable mention at the 2003 Zanzibar Film Festival. The companion film titled Sound the Drum which was produced by the students documenting the birth of TeleDrum and the making of Duara, garnered first prize in the West Virginia Film Festivals educational division.

## **DISCUSSION**

*How long is a piece of string?*

It is evident that the TeleDrum model works! It can be introduced as a pilot project in one region or introduced simultaneously in various areas by joining together established entities with common interests, already experienced and involved in the market they wish to serve. Howard University film scholar Mbye Cham states that the resulting first effort of the TeleDrum exhibits photography [that] is beautiful, and the film is edited in a thoughtful and imaginable manner likely to have a positive impact on attitudes and practices in contemporary African youth. The fact that Appalachian public school and job Corp youth responded to the film positively in spite of Swahili spoken by the young Tanzanian actors, (it is subtitled in English) also demonstrates that compelling stories cross cultural boundaries. When cultures converge to share experiences from not so different worlds they can converge for a greater good.

Filmmakers aren't soldiers. Filmmakers aren't politicians, but a filmmaker can help bring worlds together. And what can be more powerful than that?

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