

## **Narrative and financial report for Dixie L. Beadle, a recipient of the Scott Kloeck-Jenson International Internship Award, 2005**

It is impossible to definitively determine the effects of a given theatre troupe on the societies with which they interact. However, I would suggest that the multi-faceted work and social interventions of Uganda's Ndere Troupe, in particular, are far-reaching. While staying at Ndere Center this past June, I began to realize just how significant their work is as an educational tool for the masses, as a form of cultural reclamation, and demonstration of communal integration in the employment sector. While unable to quantify the Troupe's effects in this study, with great certainty I can testify that the Ndere touches the lives of many adults and children alike across Uganda, and that their success is an indication that such work can be considered paradigmatic for grass roots theatre seeking to affect social change.

Before traveling to Kampala, I was aware that Ndere was involved in theatre for development, but I had no idea of the extent of their work in this area. I was quickly to find out as leading members of the troupe, both performers and business administrators, were available to me for interviews, provided me with access to videos and scripts, and invited me to attend a brain-storming session for script development.

Ndere is the founder of Uganda Developmental Theatre Association (UDTA) with approximately 140 satellite troupes across the nation. As incentive to keep the groups active, they facilitate competitions at the county, regional, and national levels. Each group is provided with a script scenario based on a topic specific to problems that plague the area on a national scale—the AIDS epidemic, birth control, nutrition, tribalism, women's issues, privatization, and so on. Each troupe, then, is to develop the script for competition and at the same time they are performing for audiences across Uganda and educating them on the topics at hand; these topics are sponsored by various national and international NGOs as well as governmental organizations.

In the area of cultural reclamation, the Troupe hires members from various ethnic groups across Uganda to perform in the capital city of Kampala and on Troupe tours. This allows for music and dances unique to localized groups, some of which were outlawed and all but lost during the era of colonialism, to see a rebirth in performance. Their influences have crept into versions of contemporary and night-life dances

performed by younger generations, providing for inter-generational and inter-ethnic spaces of common interests. Not only are traditional dance and music beginning to see cultural revivals in Uganda, but historical costume competitions also encourage celebration in the arena of traditional dress.

If the troupe strives to educate the masses for social change and reshape national identity through cultural reclamation, their employment practices serve as a demonstration of their philosophies of working *for* the people. Ndere Troupe is about fifty members strong, many of its members recruited as children devastated in one way or another by the war in the northern region of the country. The Troupe not only trains, houses, and feeds its members, but it also educates them in areas outside the realm of performance. All must complete their education through the high school years and beyond that level, each member must learn a skill in order to support him/her self once he/she decides to leave the troupe. If they choose to attend college, the Troupe provides financial support. Ndere Troupe, then, is a theatrical community that seeks to integrate itself into the bosom of the nation's people in order that it might become an integral part of their healing and growth through education, the instillation of pride in national and cultural identities, and the creation loyalty through providing jobs and serving the people.