

Meet the Fellows: Regina Agyare

Ghana, Business and Entrepreneurship, Dartmouth College

Regina Agyare is a software developer with eight years' work experience and a social entrepreneur with a passion for using technology to drive social change. She started a social enterprise called Soronko Solutions that uses basic mass technology to drive human potential and solve social problems.

Regina is currently helping small- and medium-scale enterprises in Ghana create visibility and grow their business with technology. She is also working on a program that will develop the next generation of innovators and problem solvers from the rural communities in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics in Ghana and across sub-Saharan Africa.

Regina is also working on how the disabled in Ghana can use technology to integrate better into their communities. Her story was featured in Lean In for Graduates by Sheryl Sandberg and Impatient Optimist by The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. CNN featured her Tech Needs Girls Ghana project, which helps girls to code and create technology. Regina graduated from Ashesi University with a Bachelor of Science in computer science.

Upon completion of the Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders, she intends to use the education, experience and network to continue with her work of using technology to drive social change and scale her social enterprise.

Photo credit: Regina Agyare

Entrepreneur Turns Games into Business

As a kid, Daniel Okalany loved to play games with his friends — card games, board games, all kinds of games.

“That was a good time,” the Kampala resident said, explaining that as he grew older, finding simple games like those played with a deck of cards became tough. Then he and his friends “realized that we could make some of those games come alive again.”

In 2011, Okalany founded Kola Studios to do just that. The Kenyan company uses smartphone applications to provide games based on the Ugandan tradition of matatu and the Kenyan tradition of karata.

People want to “reconnect with games they used to play when they were younger,” said Okalany, who studied computer science at Makerere University in Kampala. The company generates revenue by integrating ads with the games.

“We haven’t looked back for a second,” the company founders state on their website. “We love working in a very relaxed and free environment, participating in the community and interacting with the budding tech community in Kampala.”

In June, Okalany, a member of the YALI Network, spent two weeks in Chicago and Washington learning how innovators and entrepreneurs in the United States tackle their common business challenges. His visit was sponsored by the Global Innovation through Science and Technology (GIST) initiative and included young entrepreneurs from Kenya, Uganda, Jordan, Tunisia, Pakistan, Indonesia and Malaysia.

“The entrepreneurs in Chicago were really good. Their companies are in different stages of growth, with annual revenues ranging from \$100,000 to several million dollars. Some had in-depth knowledge of sales, marketing, technology, copyright or trademarks,” he said.

“The most important thing that I learned is that everyone is working really hard. ... A lot of the time you think it’s just you having to work hard for these things and everyone else is getting it easy.”

Kola Studios works out of a shared office space for individuals and companies refining their business concepts. At times, he volunteers at the business hub, helping other young entrepreneurs work through their ideas.

Okalany said that upon his return to Kampala he plans to share the business insights he picked up from the U.S. entrepreneurs with members of his Kola team and with the technology and business groups in his community.

Photo credit: Daniel Okalany

Early Challenges Inspire Later Success

Entrepreneur and community volunteer Christopher Asego credits the challenges of growing up in a slum as inspiration for wanting to help end poverty.

“The world has lots of problems. People who live them every day have the best solutions,” he says on his Facebook page.

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Growing up, Asego attended an overcrowded school in Nairobi’s Kibera area. Too shy to question his teacher when he didn’t understand something, he lagged behind his classmates. “Not every child

can learn in the same way at the same speed,” he said.

But Asego had an advantage. His mother was a teacher and stuck by her son until he graduated from secondary school. “Not every child is as lucky as I was. ... A lot of children who experience early failure in school end up dropping out,” he said.

Now 27, Asego went on to graduate from Kenya’s Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology. He partnered with two peers to create Eneza Education, a firm that serves as a mobile phone-based tutor and teacher’s assistant. Eneza, which means “to reach” or “to spread,” aims “to make 50 million kids across Africa smarter,” according to the company’s website.

Asego said he will take what he learned in the United States back to his community and company. He especially wants to share his knowledge with “up-and-coming entrepreneurs” who face the challenges of getting a business off the ground. “Back home, when you approach an investor, they want to see traction — traction you don’t have because you are just a startup,” he said.

Aside from his business, Asego volunteers to help eradicate jiggers from his community. Jiggers are tropical parasitic insects that “affect the interiors of the toes of children when they walk barefoot,” Asego said. With other volunteers involved in the nationwide effort to eradicate jiggers from Kenya by 2015, Asego goes house-to-house to wash children’s feet with a disinfectant.

“I have developed some kind of attachment to the slum because I grew up there,” he said.

Photo credit: Christopher Asego
