



Doreen Kessy, Chief Operating Officer for Ubongo

UBONGO

# CHILDREN'S EDUTAINMENT AS A DRIVER FOR GENDER SOCIAL CHANGE

Ubongo supports children's access to new learning materials and to positive gender models

Education innovations not only have a role in building children's literacy and numeracy skills, but also in changing the ways that girls and boys are typically portrayed in the media. Research by the Geena Davis Institute for Gender in Media has found that children's media significantly under-represents female characters, especially among 'hero' characters and those who work to earn a living or support their families. This has a strong effect on girls' self worth and both genders' notions of gender roles and cultural norms.

HDIF grantee Ubongo is a non-profit social enterprise that creates 'edutainment' programmes for children. Originally launched in Tanzania and now broadcast across other parts of East Africa and West Africa, their cartoons have a high representation of female characters, showing young girls (and female animals) who are intelligent, curious, active, friendly and not subservient to boys or men. They show boy characters (and male animals) who treat girls equally, engage in domestic and household work, and aren't afraid to cry

*"I spent a lot of my younger years never believing what I said was important. Speak up when you need to. Speak up for justice and follow your passion."*  
Doreen Kessy

or show their emotions. As part of their research, Ubongo collect gender disaggregated data and perform analyses to ensure that girls are being reached and receiving the full benefit of their programmes.

Doreen Kessy is Chief Operating Officer for Ubongo. Her passion for edutainment that challenges gender social norms is driven by her own unconventional education (including skipping three years of school to go to college early) coupled with a strong belief in education for everyone. "The only differences between students in Tanzania and the US are poverty and lack of opportunity. It's not fair."

Despite the company's success over the past four years, Doreen believes Ubongo's innovative approach to education is only just scratching the surface. She argues that more needs to be done to encourage young people, in particular young girls and women, to explore the world beyond the school gate. "In Tanzania, we live in a culture where the quieter the child, the better she is perceived. It's a value that's killing curiosity and hindering

innovation. As a result, young women don't have the self-belief and confidence to follow their dreams. They don't think it's for them."

Doreen believes that innovative educational solutions have a vital role to play in supporting Tanzania's meaningful participation in a 'fourth industrial revolution' driven by technology. "The world is changing so fast its scary. If we don't build a generation who are equipped with practical skills then we're going to be left behind. We don't have time to waste."

## About HDIF and Ubongo

Ubongo's groundbreaking edutainment shows for children harness multi-media platforms to create positive role models and gender norms for girls and women all over Tanzania. HDIF funds 'Akili and Me', a pre-primary programme that reaches over 2.8 million households every week across East Africa through TV, radio and a mobile phone app.

*"Young people need to follow their dream. They can make a difference."*

Doreen Kessy

## About HDIF

The **Human Development Innovation Fund (HDIF)** is a £39m United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) innovation programme in Tanzania managed by a Palladium-led consortium with KPMG, Newcastle University (EG West Centre), Loughborough University (WEDC), and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS).

HDIF seeks to accelerate the experimentation, commercialisation, and diffusion of innovations in health, education, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH).

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