

Global Conscience Monthly

Global Conscience Initiative

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“Welcome

Welcome to Global Conscience Initiative’s (GCI) new edition of Global Conscience Monthly. This month on our feature page, we have the Executive Director of Global Conscience Initiative as the Big Man of the Month. Each month GCI will be talking to a new community leader or local person of authority on a variety of topics.

GCI News

The Community for Arbitration and Mediation Project (CAM) in Bombe Bakundu village for 2013 recently is about to end its workshop series. The project team will be embarking on the last phase of the project with summary tests and evaluation exercises. A graduation party to award participants with certificates has also been scheduled.

The Prisoner’s Rights Project is also being reviewed by a new intern, Charlotte Poensgen from Germany. She is eager to do anything she can so this project takes a new shape. By building up new strategies she will try to ensure that the Prisoner’s Rights Project fulfils the goals set up when it was initially designed.



GCI staff with Bombe Bakundu Councillors during CAMs Workshopseries sessions this summer 2013.

CHILDREN’S RIGHTS: A DISTURBING SITUATION IN MEME DIVISION.

Child rights in Cameroon is a highly debated subject. Although child rights activists inform the community about commonly seen violations in the area, society does not always change the problems. Frequently seen violations include child labor, malnutrition, untreated health problems, child trafficking, and a lack of education. After conducting various interviews with a diverse group of people through the Meme division of Cameroon, child rights violations have been exposed and evaluated.

Common work seen in the Meme division of Cameroon consists of manual labor, farming, selling in the market, and selling on the streets. Although this can create a relatively good amount of income, sometimes it is not enough. Many families depend on their children to help make a salary for the family. This requires children to also work: selling on the streets by carrying overly heavy trays of food, selling at the market for hours, and even working in farms. The salaries provided by children go toward funding an education, medical treatment, food, etc. Because children selling on the streets and in the market is a common occurrence, many people are desensitized to these regular violations, which is another problem that needs to be addressed. With the right training and publicity by human and child rights activists, these violations can be put to a stop. The first step is to make the community aware.

Kristen Kemp
University of Dayton '14,
Psychology, Biology, Criminal Justice.

Gender Equality in Cameroonian Culture

Women's rights have been evolving from time to time. The first claims arose in Europe by the feminist movement, who hinged on rights like the right to vote and to own property. The access to education and to the job market pushed women to go further. The first achievements, like the universal suffrage, encouraged them to claim another set of rights: economic, social and cultural rights. Therefore, new fights aiming to achieve equality within the family as well as the entire society started: equality in the decisions taken on the behalf of the family, the same chances to access to education and to the job market as well as the same remuneration for the same works.

But, do all women face the same challenges? Does talking about such rights in Africa is only an attempt to impose western fights without taking into consideration the different contest and traditions? I think is worthy to discuss about women's rights, because at least a core of common rights are shared by all women, irrespective of their culture or nationality and the benefits deriving from equality and women's participation are undeniable.

Stereotypes are deeply rooted in the African tradition and they occupy a central role in the daily life of the majority of Cameroonian women. Who does laundry? Who does provide for any meal, cooking for the whole family ekwang or 'ndole (typical African dishes that require at least 2 hours of preparation)? Chores like these, without the help of a washing machine, a micro way or a supermarket take hours and hours. Therefore, most women spend the majority of their time among burners, children and housewife's duties without even having the time for thinking to engage themselves in other activities.



Is possible to change? There are several laws that require equal rights between the spouses and many that encourage women's participation in the *res publica*, providing, for instance, that a certain number of seats in the parliament are reserved to women. But, the distance from norms to the daily life reality is still huge. These laws are meaningless unless there will be a change in the society. A step out of tradition can be made if we think that stereotypes don't spare men either. If you sit in a bar and you would like to order a sweet drink instead of the 5th round of beer, you are not behaving like a real man. Or, in the attempt of showing how a man is capable to lead his family, he

takes rushed decisions, without consulting anyone else, because that's the way society though us a man acts. Or, even, for proving themselves courageous and masculine, men are supposed to accept any kind of challenge, regardless of how reckless it is. In conclusion, stereotypes negatively affect men also, making them feel defeated if they can't keep up to such standards or preventing them to ask for help or for a piece of advice when needed. Acknowledged that these negative consequences affect women as well as men, it seems that moving to a new dimension can be beneficial for everybody. But, where to start from? Is there another way for women to affirm their independence and equality other than assuming behaviors belonging to men and denying their traditional positions? I have always felt like cooking was a denial of independence and a hinder to my personal realization. But maybe other approaches are possible. A durable and real change can't be done if supported by only half of the society, leaving unchanged the other half. Only working together, embracing shared characteristics, leads to the chance to move forward. Being caring, discussing and confronting for taking decisions and facing problems and, even, sharing cooking chores and family's duties between men and women can lead to allow anyone to have the time for developing their own personality and find his place in the society, giving his or her personal contribution for the improvement of the community.

Interview to Ntebo Ebenezer Awungafac - Executive Director of Global

Conscience Initiative



This month's -Big man is Ntebo Ebenezer Awungafac, executive director of GCI. The Curriculum series targeting the Traditional Council at the Bombe Bakundu community is concluded and it is the occasion to gather some more information about the persons who made this project possible.

Where did the idea of establishing Global Conscience Initiative come from?

Samba Churchill and I initially established an NGO named "youth for peace initiative", because we felt the need to create a place where youths had the chance to gather information and discuss actual issues concerning human rights. After a few years, we realized that the same chance should not have been limited to the youths, in order to allow the community to change. Therefore, we decided to enlarge the goal of our operation, targeting also other categories of the society, including, for instance, women groups and traditional councils and we turned the name of the NGO in Global Conscience Initiative

Does your position as human rights activist affect your private life?

Yes. During my life I find myself wearing two different faces, in order to combine my role as a HR activist and my catholic believes. Different answers would be given depending on the point of view adopted. For instance, the freedom of expression is a fundamental right, but, especially, when the topic of homosexuality arisen, I find myself facing an internal conflict. From a HR point of view, the freedom of choice and the principle of non-discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation require that any human being is free to make his own choices. But, on the other side, my religious precepts condemn homosexuality like a sin. For solving such dilemma, I try tokeep these two essential sphere of my life separated. As a HR activistI advocatethe importance of anybody being able to make his own choices and of being respectful, but, as a Christian, I have the personal choice not embrace these values in my moral believes.

What is the most difficult challenge you face in your work?

I think it's to interact with the administration. Cameroonian administration still looks toHR organizations like a threat to the government. In the sensitization of the population about human rights,we happen to enter into areas where the government would like to be to be left aloneto rule with an absolute sovereignty. For instance, Cameroonian law provides that bail is free, but it is a common practice by the police to require 25.000 CFA (40 Euros -50 dollars) for it. While we carry on activities for raising awareness in the population, we encounter the hostility of the police, the gendarmerie and other law officers. This impacts negatively on our activities when we need to interact with the public administration, requiring, for instance,authorizations or public funds.

What pushes you to go on with your activities?

I am convinced that change is imminent, but it won't arrive by magic. It is necessary to persist in our work, creating awareness in the community for changing the mentality. Thanks to this attitude, steps forwards have been made; for instance, few decades ago, sensitizing the population through activities carried out by an NGO like ours was not possible, due to the hindrances created by the government. Today, through the affirmation of the freedom of association, we have been given the opportunity to operate in the civil society and have the means for keeping up and moving forward to a better society.

Is the idea of human rights accepted and shared in Cameroon or is still considered a "white man law"?

I think human rights started to be accepted. At the public level, the possibility to introduce HR in the school curricula has been discussed and this is an opening by the public sector we have never seen in Cameroon. The society is still divided about this issue. Especially literate persons embraced fully these fundamental values, believing in their characteristic of belonging to any individual irrespective to his or her nationality, religion or gender. But, there is still a consistent part of the population that looks suspiciously to human rights, fearing that their traditions will be supplanted by values brought by their colonizers. Our activities aim to defeat these beliefs, showing and discussing the universality of human rights. For instance, GCI's staff has been working with the youth group facing the question of how religion precepts and human rights can get along well.

If you could, what would you change in the Cameroonian system?

I think what Cameroon needs is a strong and effective structure which is able to seriously implement the law that has been issued. The legislator has done its job, but these norms remain a dead letter if there aren't any organs to implement them. For instance, in the attempt to create a check and balance system, a national human right committee was established for receiving individual complaints, but, it operates like a branch of the executive power. Therefore, even if it could be a resourceful organ for the implementation of HR, it just remains useless.



INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITIES:

From August onwards we will be looking to recruit new national and international interns. If you are a hard-working and creative individual interested in Human Rights and local conflict resolution, get in touch through the contact details below.

If you ever require a legal advice on a Human Rights issue or violation, please feel free to stop by our offices. We provide support, consultation, training, and we also have an in-office library that is open to the public.

donate something, or anything else you can contact us through the following ways:



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