

### Interview with

## Ann Maria Nassanga

### Artist and film maker

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Interview conducted by Quentin Wodon

Interview series in collaboration with the  
Women, Gender, and Youth Directorate  
of the African Union Commission



#### **IICBA: Could you please tell us a bit about yourself?**

My name is Ann Maria Nassanga, but I go by Arie. I am an award-winning Ugandan filmmaker, musician, and girls' education advocate. I am the continental African Union CIEFFA ambassador for the #AfricaEducatesHer campaign. My song, Let Her Know is the theme song of this campaign.

#### **IICBA: You are a filmmaker, musician, and girls' education advocate from Uganda. How do you spend a typical day?**

Each day is usually so different from the other. I like to pray in the morning, do a simple workout routine, and find something that makes me laugh at least once a day. It could be a meme, or I would call a friend and have a hilarious conversation. After that, it is between studio time, working on a film set which includes writing, composing music, directing, and editing. I also run an Initiative called The Kalaverse that uses art to empower and educate female creatives. I like to sneak in a good book or two and a slice of my favorite fruit. My evenings may have a music performance where I go out and sing then come back home and rest.

#### **IICBA: Why is it so important to educate girls in Uganda and more generally in Africa?**

Education is the tool that equips human beings to solve complex problems, and Africa has a number of those. In my country, Uganda, hindrances to girls' education are many and are mostly fueled by a

**Background:** This series of interviews was prepared for Africa Youth Day celebrated on November 1 each year. Youth are defined by the African Union as the population from 15 to 35 years of age. The African Union Commission through the Women, Gender, and Youth Directorate (WGYP) is commemorating African Youth Day 2023 through month-long activities under the theme "1 Million Next Level is Knocking: Youth-led Movement that Transcends Borders." The theme is a call to all youth development stakeholders, member states, and partners to mobilize, implement and support the 1 Million Next Level Initiative through creating and accelerating opportunities for youth in the 4Es +H (Education, Employment, Entrepreneurship, Engagement + Health and wellbeing). The youth featured in this series of interviews are exemplary in their work in service to others in the areas covered by 4Es+H.



**IICBA: You did a great documentary about a female doctor in Karamoja? What did you learn?**

Thank you very much. Karamoja is one of the most rural regions of Uganda. Haunted by the aforementioned practices of early marriage and female genital mutilation, it is very rare for a girl from this pastoral community to complete primary school, let alone secondary school. For Dr. Faith Nangiyo to persevere and not only finish school but also become one of the region's first and most celebrated female Karamojong doctors is nothing short of a miracle! My takeaway from the experience was a quote by Dr. Faith when I asked her what kept her going. She said, 'We are not where we were born or where we grew up but we each have a choice as to who we eventually become.'

**IICBA: You have worked with AU CIEFFA for some time. How have you been able to contribute to the African Union's work?**

The remix of my song, *Let Her Know*, is the continental theme song for the African Union CIEFFA #AfricaEducatesHer campaign to educate girls post Covid-19. I am also an ambassador for this campaign. Furthermore, my documentary film *Little Faith* has been screened by the African Union CIEFFA to promote girls' education post Covid-19.

misconception of who the African/Ugandan girl truly is. Negative practices like early marriage and female genital mutilation are grounded in the fatal belief that women are men's property/slaves and therefore do not need to go to school.

And yet, women are the backbone of our communities, so this means that when you educate a girl/woman, you are empowering a whole family and community, and therefore a generation of problem solvers. I believe that for Africa to quickly solve our many problems, empowering and educating girls/women must rise to the top of the list.

**IICBA: What are examples of good (and maybe not so-good) approaches to promote girls' education?**

One good way of promoting girls' education is through the use of mass media and technology. With the rise of the information age, using social media to spread awareness has proven effective in bringing dark cultures to light and therefore making room for relevant and timely conversations by many people over a short period of time. Using technologically advanced art forms like music and film has also made it easier to inspire society towards the cause of girls' education. As Africans, we are very musical and enjoy expressing ourselves through art like dance and theatre. As promoters of girls' education, we should continue to embrace the place of arts in motivating fellow Ugandans/Africans towards real change.

A not so good way is upholding negative gender stereotypes in education. For example, endorsing the thought that girls are not good at sciences or mathematics, or that girls cannot do courses that involve technology and engineering. This is a misconception that ends up discouraging many otherwise excellent female students.







**IICBA: What could governments and other stakeholders do to improve opportunities for girls in Africa?**

The governments should implement and enforce strict laws that protect a girls' right to education. In many rural areas, these laws are not strictly obeyed and are often overridden by customary law and tradition.

**IICBA: What advice do you have for other youth in Africa?**

Don't wait for your government to 'figure things out for you,' take the step and solve the local problems in your local community. There is always a wealthy reward for problem solvers.

**IICBA: Looking back, is there something you would do differently in your career?**

All the mistakes and failures I have experienced have become stepping stones to my next level. So looking back, I am happy to say I have no regrets, only lessons no matter how painful.

**IICBA: Finally, could you please share a personal anecdote about yourself?**

Growing up, I was so much of a tomboy that I often prayed I would mysteriously go to sleep and wake up as a boy. I was afraid of the looming, seemingly inevitable burden of womanhood. Years later, I am a girls' education advocate by some twisted sense of destiny. And more than my gift and passion for storytelling, what truly sets me apart is that I am an African girl. It is interesting that the key to our freedom is sometimes locked up in a safe called fear.



**Disclaimer & Acknowledgment**

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