

University Report

BBC AFRICAN SERVICE, LONDON

UNIVERSITY REPORT

No. 170

Broadcast on 17th, 19th, 20th & 21st October 1971

- GWYNETH HENDERSON: Today in 'University Report' a mature, successful man talks about his reasons for giving up his security to go to University - talks about the problems he's faced - talks about some of the extra things he's gaining because he is a mature student. Kabwe Kasoma is in his thirties, has a wife and five children, was a qualified teacher and then a social worker - now he's entering his last year as a student in the University of Zambia. Well Kabwe was in London for forty-eight hours recently - he came in to visit me, and my first question was why - given that he had a responsible good job with a good salary - why had he thrown it all up to go to University in Lusaka.
- KABWE KASOMA: I have always been wanting to get some more education, I felt dissatisfied with the amount of education I had had, and I thought in a world where you have paper qualifications counting a lot I had to go back and get more education. I don't believe in it being an end in itself but quite a good means to an end.
- GWYNETH HENDERSON: But surely you were in fact doing a very useful job, either as a school master or as a social worker in Kitwe. Couldn't you have carried on with just the experience that you've have? Did you need the paper qualifications as well?
- KABWE KASOMA: Not really, I think that was partly due to some kind of frustration. I was a bit frustrated waiting for the City Council of Kitwe and I thought I could get out of this by getting some more education and perhaps come back as a social worker.
- GWYNETH HENDERSON: You decided to read English and History at University. Why these two subjects?

- KABWE KASOMA: In fact I wanted to read more social work at the University and due to the bursary arrangements I was told to do education. I had no way out, I was told either I did education or there was nothing for me, so I ended up doing education.
- GWYNETH HENDERSON: Does this mean, in fact, that when you've finished you have to go back to teaching?
- KABWE KASOMA: Yes, I have to.
- GWYNETH HENDERSON: For how long?
- KABWE KASOMA: For about two years.
- GWYNETH HENDERSON: This is a government scheme, that you are in fact bonded because they are paying your fees.
- KABWE KASOMA: Yes. The government is not really that particular, they could still allow me to go elsewhere.
- GWYNETH HENDERSON: Providing though it was what the government wanted you to do.
- KABWE KASOMA: Yes.
- GWYNETH HENDERSON: But if Kabwe is to go back to teaching again - why go to the University - what is it giving him that will make him a better teacher and make him happier as a teacher. Well in fact Zambia University has started something that Kabwe Kasoma feels has been, and is, of great use to him. His main interest is in drama, in particular he is a playwright - and so the Chukwakwa theatre experiment dedicated to developing Zambia's indigenous drama is especially important to him because -
- KABWE KASOMA: First of all its philosophy is taking theatre to the people rather than bringing people to the theatre. It seeks to take its plays which are based on African experience, unlike plays which are based on say Western experience, into the African townships where the masses live, and I think that's why I feel it is a theatre that is really oriented towards developing the indigenous Zambian theatre.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: Yes, sure, but at the same time Chukwaka is basically a University inspired idea. Do you think the impetus created originally by the university and by people like you can really keep going?

KABWE KASOMA: Yes, I think so because it is rural oriented, rural in that you don't find things like lighting and complicated stage equipment in Chukwaka. You use gas lamps which any school or any little town in a rural area can afford, and since it's training students to think of theatre not as a very expensive venture which can be done in a rural area, I feel that it is really oriented towards the masses and the masses live in the rural area.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: Sure. But at the same time it is you who are doing the orientating, it is you who are taking the decisions that this is what the masses, the rural people, like. I mean the impetus has nevertheless come from you. Say you have to leave Lusaka, you can't continue working with Chukwaka. What's going to happen to it?

KABWE KASOMA: Well, I'm only hoping that some more people will come forward and continue with the Chukwaka idea. I don't need to be in Lusaka to carry out on the Chukwaka experiment, I can build Chukwaka anywhere in Zambia. For instance, I have been for some time, wanting to build a Chukwaka type of theatre in Kitwe, which is a hundred or so miles from Lusaka.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: As a student at the University, what in fact has your involvement been with Chukwaka?

KABWE KASOMA: I have been engaged in acting, I have produced my own play 'The Fools Marry' for Chukwaka, and I took a course on theatre, arranged by the University, and I've also been helping in the productions of other plays.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: What is the sort of proportion between university people and non-university people in the theatre - the people who act, the people who direct, the people who make use of Chukwaka's facilities?

KABWE KASOMA: I'm afraid up to now I would say it's mainly the university people who make use of it, but we have had groups that are non-university like the National Dance Troup coming to perform, we've had secondary schools performing in Chukwakwa and one or two training colleges like the N.R.T.C. which is called the Natural Resources Development Training College.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: What about the audiences?

KABWE KASOMA: The audiences have been both university students, lecturers, and in particular, people from the townships and it is situated in a growing area, and the township which is growing around it is that of what I might term the common people and it is I think aimed at capturing this particular audience.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: How open is Chukwakwa to the people who surround it, the people of Lusaka?

KABWE KASOMA: You know you don't have anyone sort of keeping the keys of the theatre because it has no doors in fact, and anybody can walk into the theatre, maybe from a drinking party, and start singing right there, and they need not be university students or university members of staff, they can be anyone from any particular community.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: Do you find at certain times that somebody will come in and start doing something and then an audience will collect?

KABWE KASOMA: I think the problem that Chukwakwa has now is that the community that is expected to grow around it is not yet there. There is a little distance now between the Chukwakwa theatre and the communities, so I don't think I've seen anything like that, anyone walking in and starting to perform and managing to collect any appreciable audience because there are not people right there just now.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: As far as you and the other students are concerned socially, has it meant that perhaps you haven't remained as aloof as you might have done, as elitist as you might have done?

- KABWE KASOMA: Yes. Perhaps previously before I had the Chukwakwa experience I would have thought of a play that would sound very convincing to a white audience. I can now think of a play that should sound more convincing to a black audience and that should be based on the experience of that audience. So that I am now aiming at my own African audience rather than the elitist audience.
- GWYNETH HENDERSON: So that old image of the University being an ivory tower takes another hefty knock! And for Kabwe Kasoma it seems, in a sense, it's the extra curricular activities of his life at University that he finds most exciting - and he's certainly happy. But nevertheless it must in some ways be difficult entering university as a mature-age entry student - difficult to settle again to study, difficult to be with people fifteen years or so younger than you. The main one for Kabwe was -
- KABWE KASOMA: The problem of family upkeep. My wife is now teaching in Kitwe, I have five children and fortunately the government gives them an allowance, but then I haven't been used to a monthly salary and getting into a situation where I don't get any salary at all, and I need a bottle or so of beer at times, so it is very difficult experience, I mean a very difficult thing to go for months and months on end without expecting any money from anywhere except a little allowance at the end of a term.
- GWYNETH HENDERSON: Did you find any problems getting on with the bulk of the students who are school leavers?
- KABWE KASOMA: I don't think so, no.
- GWYNETH HENDERSON: They accepted you?
- KABWE KASOMA: I was very happy with them and they accept me - I was just one of them.
- GWYNETH HENDERSON: Did you in fact find yourself cast rather in the role of a father figure?

- KABWE KASOMA: Not really. I think it's partly due to my interests. I am interested in drama for instance, and I'm bound to attract much younger people around me, and they accept me as one of them. Of course there is a certain air of respect, and this is due to African custom, that I command.
- GWYNETH HENDERSON: But you didn't find it difficult at all settling in amongst a society that was very much younger than you?
- KABWE KASOMA: No. What I might probably have found, I wouldn't say difficult, but a bit embarrassing, was when I was asked to share one room with a much younger student. I complained of course and the authorities were kind enough to look into it and I have been having one room to myself all the time.
- GWYNETH HENDERSON: You're coming now to the end of your degree programme. Do you think in fact that the University gains by having a mixture of age amongst its students?
- KABWE KASOMA: Yes it does. I think it does quite a lot, because younger people are very emotionally charged usually, and in a situation where, for instance, they might begin being violent, you normally have older people like me putting in a word or two of advice, and you have things sort of balancing - you don't have stone throwing all the time and such kind of behaviour. So I think it is a good thing to have this mixture because I have experience in life which a younger man hasn't, and they know how to go about problems. The younger generation is forming a sub-culture and and there is a gap which is sort of growing every day between the older generation and the younger generation and in educational institutions where you have ideas springing up, anything can happen. But if you have these two elements existing, co-existing, say within an educational institution you have the tendency to the narrowing of this gap, what I might call the generation gap, and I think it is a good thing that we have all over the world in such institutions a mixture of the old and the younger generation.
- GWYNETH HENDERSON: Do you think in fact that as far as your ability to absorb information, to take advantage, if you like, of the whole educational process that is a University, not only the academic, strictly academic degree side, do you think it has been easier for you to get more advantage?

KABWE KASOMA:

Yes, and I'm not sort of belittling the intelligence of the younger students, but I think the university education is more what I might call life experience, experience in the real life situation, and it's only a person who has had some experience in real life and not spent all the time in a boarding school under the orders of a boarding master or a head-master who is going to benefit more from University education. For instance I know how to regulate my time, I know when to study and when to play about. You have a younger person who, having been used to school discipline, would not know how to use his time. He might perhaps use it at a bar all the time and doesn't know when to go to the library.

GWYNETH HENDERSON:

Well on this very interesting point - what is the best age to gain maximum advantage from University education - I did a quick census amongst my colleagues and nearly all said they wished they could go back and have their University time again now that they are adult -- now that they know what they are interested in, and how to use their time! And I have a distinct feeling that Kabwe Kasoma does indeed know all those things! Incidentally his interest in drama - apart from writing, acting and directing has already taken him into the international field. This summer he was elected to the General Council of the International Amateur Theatre Association - and he was on his way back from their annual meeting in Sweden when he dropped in on 'University Report'. The Gambia was the only other African country in fact to be represented at the meeting.

And that's about it for this week - next week two really new and exciting ideas - from Malawi an experiment in adult education of immense importance - and a new type of teaching material on East African history.

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