

Bayimba Foundation has a new home

Bayimba Foundation has now a place of its own. One thing is sure; this new home is not a regular and common one. Since beginning 2018, Bayimba is the owner of Lunkulu Island, just a bit outside of Kampala, the capital city of Uganda. This summer, the new venue has hosted for the first time one of Bayimba's activities. The Bayimba International festival took place on the island from August 2nd until 5th 2018. Faisal KIWEWA, the director and founder of Bayimba Foundation, tells us more about this adventure.

Bayimba Foundation is one of Uganda's leading cultural operator and Africalia's single partner in the country. The foundation created in 2006 has been operating in the arts and cultural sector actively since 2007. Bayimba organised its first festival in 2008 and currently they are running different festivals across the country: the Bayimba International Festival, the Amakula International Film Festival, DOADOA | East African Performing Arts Market, the Kampala International Theatre Festival and soon in 2019 the Dance Convention for contemporary dance. The focus is also on visual / performing arts education and arts management through the Bayimba Academy with courses for musicians, sound engineers, creative writers, etc. each of them coming with a proper certificate training.

Home sweet home

Since its founding, Bayimba has always wanted to have a place of its own. The team has its office but no spaces dedicated to arts production, arts creation and innovation. They needed to rent sites for their activities. However enjoying one's own space means that, whether there are resources or not, there is no worrying about rent since it is always possible to work around the space to see what is possible to do with it. *"We have always wanted to have our own space to curate the festivals the way we want rather than being in a space that is not our home and that limits us in what we can do, the time that we have..."*, says Faisal KIWEWA, Bayimba's director. Time is something important. At the National Theatre, the team only had two days to set up the festival and one day to clean up after because that was what Bayimba could afford for in terms of renting.

Today, Bayimba has a home but it is not as any other cultural venue. The space acquired is an island on Lake Victoria: Lunkulu Island. It is based in the Mukono area and is part of the Greater Kampala metropolitan and Buwuka Bay. The island is quite close to the city – one hour and a half drive from Kampala – and easily accessible by boat or by foot thanks to a bridge. Lunkulu is one hundred eight thousand meters square, invaded by flora it is uninhabited. For the moment the space is almost empty and the team can imagine whatever they want and give life to their creative ideas. This summer they organised one of their festivals on the island for the first time: the Bayimba International Festival. Artists were invited in residency, working on different aspects of the festival during two weeks. They really had the time to do things and experiment which was not the case for the previous editions. *"Moving the festival to this space was new energy, to see it come to life and envision our own space and we want to see it transform from what it is now to what it will be in the next ten years once it is fully designed and wrapped out with the help of architects and designers"* declares Faisal.

A new experience for everybody

Relocating the festival to Bayimba's new home was a challenge. For the team, it was like if they were organising a festival for the first time. Many things were different. *"When you are in a location you are used to, it is flowing. You know what you are expecting. Now we are in our new location and it's a*

jungle.” highlights Faisal. Running an activity there for the first time was a lot of work and imagination. Bayimba had to figure out what would be the movements, how to make the routings, what are the dark points, where to install power and water, etc. In addition to the seven people forming the team, there were four interns, sixteen volunteers and moreover sixty workers slashing, taking care of the space, cleaning the toilets... and two hundred security agents.

For the artists performing, it was a lot of excitement knowing that Bayimba has a home. They definitely want to be part of the adventure.

Regarding the audience, the festival has attracted many locals from the communities living in the neighbourhood. Most of them had never heard of Bayimba and wonder how come all these popular artists they die to see are playing in the middle of nowhere. This was a lot of excitement for this new public but it was also a new experience for the public following Bayimba over the time.

A lot of people were on the island for the Bayimba International Festival but it didn't feel crowded. They were scattered between the different places and stages and everybody had a great time. Faisal and his team are looking forward to the next activity they will organise on Lunkulu.

A creative cultural “city”

Bayimba wishes to transform the island in a creative cultural “city” where anyone – from local to regional, continental, international – can come and find something for them. *“Lunkulu would be a new model of cultural entrepreneurship on the continent. We are going to work in collaboration with others, in joint ventures, in joint investments. It will take time but we want it to be a collaborative space”* insists Faisal. Bayimba's idea is not only to present their own festivals. Faisal wants to work with other local cultural operators who have interesting content but don't have a space to exhibit or showcased it. Moreover, the island will also host the Bayimba Academy, museums, social spaces, creative labs, dance studios, theatre studios, co-working areas, offices and accommodation facilities.

A year round cashless microfinance system will be implemented: everybody – people living in the Bay area, the artists, the public – who comes to the island, either if its for the festival or not, gets a Bayimba Bank card. If someone wants to buy something, that person opens up an account in the system and puts credit on the card. This system is also an alternative way that Bayimba has found to finance its own space, taking care of it – it needs a constant cleaning otherwise the flora becomes very wild – and to sustain its programming. For example, if you put 100 \$ and that you spend 80 \$, that means that you will still have 20 \$ available. Bayimba can reinvest the money not spent in other things until people come back and spend it.

This membership involves a small contribution: 1% of the expenses goes to Bayimba Foundation. If someone transacts 1.000 \$, 10 \$ go to the Foundation. The more people are transacting, the more money is collected. Bayimba plans to reinvest it in their different programmes: training children and artists and provide them the best skills and knowledge. Faisal adds: *“That is why we want to create the academy and have practitioners, innovators, creative spaces, presenting spaces, platforms to present the works. It is a 360: you study, you create, you produce, you present and at all levels you can also archive, document your work or have it exhibited for the next generation to see that this work was created by this artist in that specific area.”*

Unfortunately, the system was not operational yet this year but network points will be set up everywhere for the next festival.

Contribute to the economy of the Mukono Buwuka Bay area

Besides, the Mukono Buwuka Bay area would be investigated as a creative hub in order for the local people to start investing in some of the things that people coming to the island need: hotels, accommodations, restaurants, transports, etc. The Bay area and the people living there must be part of the greater cultural space and the fishermen and farmers part of the ecosystem, reducing on the food print so that the food is not brought from Kampala but it comes from the neighbourhood. The money the locals will earn can then be reinvested in their families.

Bayimba has done very strong evaluations of the communities around and they show that 99% of the people living in the area are not educated. *“I think if we make the investment and give this 99% of people an access to arts education, they will become the next generation of creative entrepreneurs, actors, musicians, programmers, sound engineers and service providers because they will be raised with this kind of spirit.”* concludes Faisal.

Bayimba believes in being a genuine Ugandan initiative. Being Ugandan is the concept behind the brand. Even if Bayimba’s mission is to transform Uganda in a creative hub, the team is aware that to achieve this they need to work with everybody. The durability of Bayimba’s actions depends on the implication of the locals and communities and this has always been at the back of their mind.

By Audrey Brisack