

# Exploring creative approaches to act against corruption in West Africa and the Western Balkans

CREATING CHANGE

CREATING CHANGE

## WEST AFRICA

Ghana  
Guinea  
Senegal

## WESTERN BALKANS

Bosnia and Herzegovina  
North Macedonia  
Albania  
Serbia

The Anti-Corruption Regional Creative Hubs project created a platform for artists, activists and journalists in the Western Balkans and West Africa to receive training, build regional networks, and experiment on the ground with creative activism tools and tactics, thereby provoking interest and mobilizing broad public action against corruption. Passionate advocates from both regions, empowered by applying new approaches and tools, were testing whether they can motivate a broader public response against corruption with the intentional use of symbols, signs, and stories that resonate deeply in their own contexts. As stated by the founders of the Center for Artistic Activism (C4AA), a key partner in this work - artistic activism is a practice aimed at generating AEffect: emotionally resonant experiences that lead to measurable shifts in power. Most importantly, it has an enormous potential to energize people and organizations and to stimulate a culture of creativity. We hope at least some of all this is seen through the content offered in this publication.

**DON'T WASTE THE WASTE**

Vanja Lazić (Bosnia and Herzegovina)  
Nana Akosua Hanson (Ghana)

**BE ART ACTIVE AGAINST CORRUPTION IN YOUR SOCIETY!**

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Oumar Sall (Senegal)  
Dragana Gunin (North Macedonia)

**[AR] - TITUDE**  
USING AUGMENTED REALITY TO COMBAT DATA CORRUPTION IN GHANA AND SERBIA

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**ART AGAINST CORRUPTION**

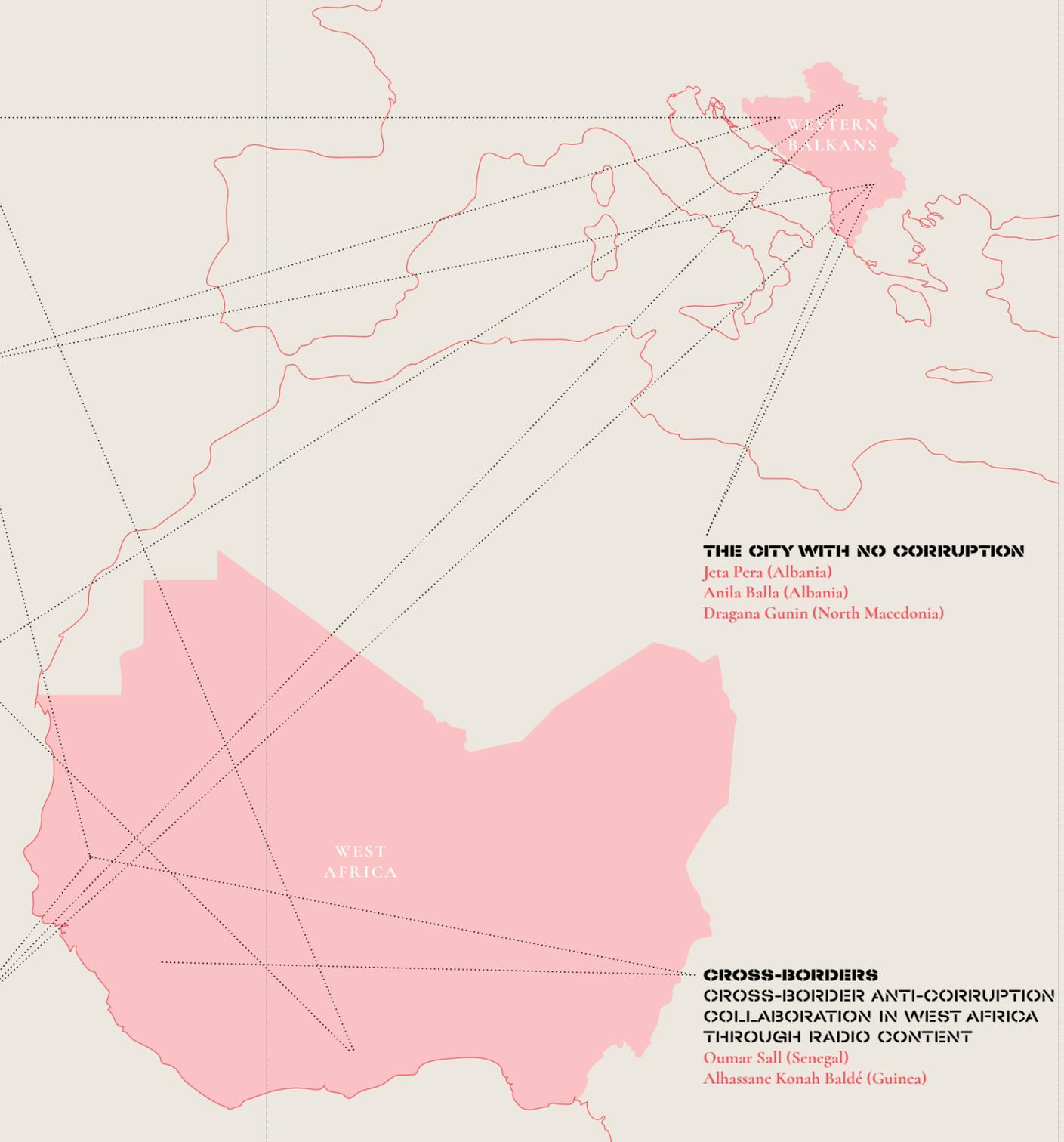
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**THE CITY WITH NO CORRUPTION**

Jeta Pera (Albania)  
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**CROSS-BORDERS**  
CROSS-BORDER ANTI-CORRUPTION COLLABORATION IN WEST AFRICA THROUGH RADIO CONTENT

Oumar Sall (Senegal)  
Alhassane Konah Baldé (Guinea)





Korkuyorum.

# CREATING CHANGE

Exploring creative approaches  
to act against corruption in  
West Africa and the Western Balkans

Dakar – Skopje

2022

## CREATING CHANGE

Exploring creative approaches to act against corruption in West Africa and the Western Balkans

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**NEMAMO ŠTA IZGUBITI  
AKO NE ŽELIŠ BITI ČOVJEK  
NIKO TI NEĆE POMOĆI!**

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# THE CLICK

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# THAT INSPIRED EXPERI- MENTA- TION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Slavica INDJEVSKA and Hawa BA  
on behalf of Regional Creative Hubs Initiative

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This initiative can be a story about *a click* that changes everything, but it can also be a story about the importance of dreaming in color. Just as it can be a story about the importance of not forgetting how fun the game can be, how productive and comfortable it is to be in a team built on trust, respect and flexibility ... A story about the importance of an individual, but mostly a story where the key point is the power of the collective - both in terms of mobilization of efforts and ambition of transformational change. Yes, this story can be possible and true, even within the framework of funders' work and in their relationship with the beneficiaries and communities they strive to serve. This initiative is about that and much more.

*The click* happened at the Center for Creative Activism (C4AA) artistic&creative activism workshops organized by OSF Culture and Arts program for OSF employees during 2017 and 2018. The combination of the opportunity to think UTOPIA while designing and implementing meaningful creative public actions and campaigns - offered by the creative activism methodology coined by Steven Duncombe and Steve Lambert of the C4AA - proved to be a much-needed dosage of oxygen for re-thinking our approaches and taking our work as grantmakers and advocates of social change to the next level. In

a nutshell, we could see for ourselves that the creative activism methodology actually works, enabling a meaningful process that combines flexibility, inclusiveness and endless fun for everyone involved. Moreover, one finds in it an inexhaustible fountain that boosts creativity and inspiration for social action. Frankly, it is the winning combination on a personal and professional level.

One of the major points of departure in our thinking about this joint initiative was that corruption has a dramatic impact on citizens' daily lives in both the Western Balkans and West Africa. Civil society actors in both regions, often, fail to generate narratives that the general public can relate to although constantly engaged – presenting anti-corruption information via technical reports and financial analyses, while seeking to mobilize advocacy campaigns through petitions, letters-to-the-editor, demonstrations, and other traditional methods which fail to resonate with citizens at large. Enormous resources are invested in raising citizens' awareness about corruption plague, but effective civic mobilization and public action is still limited in terms of outreach and impact.

Encouraged by our own experience with the initial training based on a rigorously articulated curriculum, yet with the irresistible taste of the playfulness of the

process, the urge for creation and the unstoppable desire and commitment to respond to the challenges of new, jointly defined and more successful anti-corruption approaches, several of us spent the summer of 2018 in numerous online meetings designing this initiative. To be fair, for many of us this was a rather strange, unusual, almost impossible combination: bringing together un/ usual suspects i.e., artists and activists, journalists committed to challenging the existing anti-corruption practices and dominant narratives. However, the small working group flocked around this idea, convinced in the power of joint forces and supported by previous successful experiences of cooperation within the OSF network, despite the initial doubts of many - continued polishing the idea and presented it at an Open Society Foundations (OSF) Network Convening on Anti-Corruption in Bogota, in September 2018. A number of OSF thematic programs and foundations immediately took to this experimental concept and decided to sponsor it: Open Society Initiative for West Africa, Foundation Open Society Macedonia, Open Society Fund - Bosnia & Herzegovina, Open Society Foundation Serbia, and Open Society Foundation for Albania, with support from the OSF Culture & Art Program, the Economic Justice Program, and the Strategy Unit Lab.

Following the project's approval by OSF leadership in late 2018, resulting from the OSF Anti-Corruption Convening's effort to generate new global initiatives seeking to approach anti-corruption work in more innovative, efficient and impactful ways, it was launched in the second half of 2019. Apart from the contributions of each partner program/foundation, the project is funded by a portion of more than \$4m allocated globally from OSF Reserves to support collaborative anti-corruption projects. As an experiment aimed at generating learning and robust cross-regional collaboration, the initiative is supported by a group of expert advisors in both the Western Balkans and West Africa, two fellows (one from each region), and an evaluation consulting organization.

**The Anti-Corruption Regional Creative Hubs** project created a platform for artists, activists and journalists in the Western Balkans and West Africa to receive training, build regional networks, and experiment on the ground with creative activism tools and tactics, thereby provoking interest and mobilizing broad public action against corruption. Passionate advocates from both regions, empowered by applying new approaches and tools, were testing whether they can motivate a broader public response against corruption with the intentional use

of symbols, signs, and stories that resonate deeply in their own contexts. As stated by the founders of the Center for Artistic Activism (C4AA), a key partner in this work - artistic activism is a practice aimed at generating *AEffect*: emotionally resonant experiences that lead to measurable shifts in power. Most importantly, it has an enormous potential to energize people and organizations and to stimulate a culture of creativity. We hope at least some of all this is seen through the content offered in this publication.

Imagined as a concept that will maximize opportunities for in-person meetings and collaborative work, it was hugely challenged by the travel restrictions imposed by COVID-19 safety and protection protocols. In fact, we managed to meet physically only three times at the outset of the initiative in 2019: at a kick-off meeting in Belgrade in April, the initial training for participants in Sarajevo in September, and in a regional forum in Dakar in December. The imposed COVID pandemic protocols made us move online a progressive schedule of trainings, extensive mentoring sessions and convenings focused on sharing, exchanging, experimenting and learning together. As a result of this global collaborative effort, this initiative has equipped the participating engaged activists, artists, and journalists with the capacity to not only

stage public actions in their local communities, later within the regions and culminating in cross-regional collaborative initiatives, but also to train others locally to challenge the entrenched cultures of corruption in their respective regions. Along the way, the Open Society Foundation team (Steering Committee) – a group of dedicated enthusiasts in three continents – met regularly, both in person and remotely to collectively navigate the new changing reality, manage the processes, share lessons and reiterate the project approach and timeline based on the results of artistic activism interventions conducted on the ground as well as training sessions in both regions.

We strongly believe that this publication, the video also featuring some of the projects supported by this initiative, including extensive materials that followed many of our on-line convenings, will continue to inspire even more creative and innovative civic actions and campaigns fighting the dominant narratives and corruption practices. We are convinced this dynamic network of passionate and creative advocates created within this initiative will find other avenues to even more innovative and effective ways to challenge either local or regional existing cultures and further promote intra- and cross-regional collaborations. As for the Open Society Foundations

network – we believe our lessons learned can inform and inspire future advocacy campaigns and network initiatives that are rooted in the capital created with this kind of cross-regional collaborative work.

The experience presented in this publication is just a small part of this rich body of work created within this initiative. More importantly, there is an unquantifiable degree of learnings on the joy of human encounters and solidarity that no words of book can capture. We believe that this is also part of the legacy of this initiative and will continue to feed the spirit, work and lives of all those who have been part of the journey at every level of the spectrum.

We remain grateful to each and every one who has contributed to this initiative.

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# A THEORY OF CHANGE FOR CREATIVE ACTIVISM\*

Stephen DUNCOMBE

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Professor of Media and Culture, New York University

\* This essay has been adapted from a chapter of Stephen Duncombe's *Effect: The Affect and Effect of Art and Activism*,  
Fordham University Press, forthcoming 2022.

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With art people come to see what is happening, and not the speeches or someone speaking.  
There it is real, we see, it speaks, it communicates without speaking.

—  
Mahamadou Cellou Diallo,  
Regional Creative Hub participant

Underlying any practice aiming to have an impact is a theory of change. A theory of change, for all its formidable sounding name, is actually quite simple: it is a proposition that change happens and it happens for a reason. The term “Theory of Change,” however, has accumulated a lot of baggage. We often talk about it as if we are all speaking of the same thing when frequently we are not, and as if we know what is being talked about in the first place when sometimes we don’t. Theories of change are sometimes explicit, for example when a program officer for an NGO is drafting an official report and needs to explain exactly how a certain program will bring about a desired outcome. But sometimes theories of change are more implicit, which is often the case in a field like creative activism, where so much is done by feel and through practice rather than theorized and articulated. The interviews of the Regional Creative Hub participants that follow attempt to take these largely implicit theories of change and render them explicit. Before we explore these different approaches, however, we need to understand what they might have in common.

At the root of creative activism is an engagement with culture, as 1) the social setting within which creative activists work, 2) the creative form they produce with their intervention, and 3) the field of power in which they hope to have an initial impact (understanding that a shift in culture is necessary for a change in policy, politics, institutions, etc.). Culture is something universal to humans: we all create it and live within it. Yet culture is also highly particular; we all live within different cultures. As Maja Kalafatić explains in her interview, a creative intervention that works in Serbia will not necessarily work in Slovenia because, as Regina Sambou points out in the case of Ghana and Guinea, the cultures of each country differ. And even within one country, like Guinea, what works in one region may not travel well to another, as Mahamadou Cellou Diallo reminds us. Key to creative activism is its cultural specificity.

It stands to reason, then, that Theories of Change regarding creative activism will also differ as well depending upon context and practitioner. It is at this particular, case-by-case level that Theory of Change is often talked about by NGOs, funders, organizations, and by creative activists themselves. This makes sense, for what creative activists and those who support them are interested in is a specific strategy to bring about change for a specific issue, at a specific time, and in a specific place. But what’s missed in all of this attention to specificity and particularity is a *general* theory for how creative activism works writ large. What is special about creative activism? What are the most impactful points of intervention? Why is culture and creativity important for bringing about change, anyway? In order to answer these questions, we need to take a step back from the immediate and the contextual, and develop an overarching model with which to understand a general theory of change.

## IDEALIST AND MATERIALIST THEORIES OF CHANGE

Traditionally, there are two schools of thought when it comes to theories of change: *idealist* and *materialist* (to which I will later be adding a third). In common parlance, an idealist is someone whose head is in the clouds, a dreamer with little concern for the practicalities of life, whereas a materialist is someone obsessed with the things of the world, often money, property, and possessions. The terms idealist and realist, however, take on specialized – yet not unrelated

-- meanings when it comes to theories of change. An idealist theory of change contends that humans act to bring about change through the power of ideas. People develop an idea of what is wrong with society as it is, an idea of what a better society might look like, and an idea of what must be done to bring it about. They then apply this idea to the material world in order to change things like political systems, institutions, policies and other forms of structural power. In visual form, an Idealist theory of change looks something like this:



Where changes in ideas lead to change in the material world.

One can see the traces of this Idealist theory of change in many of the projects described below. Jeta Pera, working with Roma and Egyptian “recyclers” in Albania who are harassed by authorities while securing their livelihood, describes how her creative interventions were meant to “raise this issue” and “ring the alarm” about the divide between the world of these communities and those of politicians and officials who devise and enforce policies regarding garbage disposal. This change in ideas is necessary, in Jeta’s estimation, to “build public pressure on institutions responsible for tackling these social issues.” But this seemingly simple and straightforward Idealist theory of change is immediately complicated by Jeta’s creative activism. Her project is not about merely positing and publicizing an idea, it entails the installation of visual props and the creative use of irony as a way of communicating visually and performatively wealth and power disparities that are embedded within economic and political structures. The ideas she wants to impart to her audience are ones that arise out of the reality of the lives of the recyclers and politicians and her creative activism is a way to “make explicit” these conditions. This brings us to a second common way of understanding change: a Materialist theory.

A materialist theory of change flips the idealist one upon its head. Instead of ideas prompting people, it is the material conditions in which people find themselves that move them toward change. Humans respond to their environment and through this activity generate ideas, including ideas about social change. To visualize a materialist theory of change the causal direction is merely reversed, as such:



Where changes in material conditions create changes in ideas.

In order to change material conditions, however, one needs to thoroughly understand the material one is working with. This is as true for contemporary creative activists working within complex power structures as it was for early humans setting their first fires. Revealing his journalistic training, the first thing Mahamadou does with his group in Guinea is what he calls “the investigation stage.” As he describes this stage: “First you have to know what is the problem, what causes it, and what are the consequences of the problems, as well as who are the victims.” In order to stage an impactful intervention, you also need to know the places in which corruption happens and bring the action to those places. As Mahamadou continues, “It is good to do [creative activism] where the corruption is done. If it’s at the market, it’s good to do it at the edge of the market. If it is at the ministry, it must be done in front of the ministry.” In other words, if one is to battle corruption in the marketplace or the ministry, intervention must begin in that material setting.

These theories of social change are what social scientists call “ideal types” -- analytic categories used to separate and categorize the messiness of the real world. In the mess of life, however, idealists acknowledge the power of the material. The value of ideas, ultimately, is the power these ideas have to transform material reality. As Jeta underscores, the point of attempting to “raise this issue” is to “build public pressure on institutions.” And even the staunchest materialist believes that humans don’t merely react to material conditions, they *interact* with material conditions, and this is a conscious and creative activity, which is why Mahamadou’s “investigation stage” is so critical. So instead of drawing unidirectional arrows that give dominance to either ideas or material conditions, a more useful model might look like this:

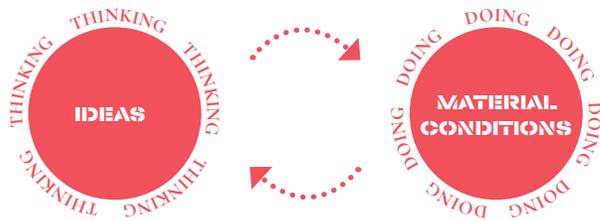


Where Ideas and Material Conditions are interdependent and each is shaped by the other.

Ideas and Material Conditions are not mere natural forces. Ideas don’t fall from the heavens, they are the result of human action, that is *thinking*. (Even if one believes that ideas do have divine inspiration, humans are the ones who actively translate them into words, images, and sounds and then communicate them to others.) Likewise, while material conditions may stand outside humans, our relationship to them is not passive. We are always acting within and upon material conditions, that is, we are continually *doing*. (Even the “natural world” is largely the product of the human action to set aside a preserve.) Human *agency* is key to understanding social change.

Thinking and doing, and the necessary interconnection between the two, is central to how Igor Ilievski describes his project working to expose and dramatize corruption in North Macedonia. Igor explains that as a journalist his job was to convey ideas, often about material conditions. But he also realized the limits of this traditional practice. “There are so many whitepapers and NGOs proclaiming their positions,” he says, “but at this stage they are really limited in impact. Societies everywhere are saturated with meaningless and empty political

proclamations. Everyone has heard about climate change, the danger of extremism and radicalism, etc., but after a while they are just buzzwords”. As long as ideas remain abstractions, they have little impact. As a creative activist he has been exploring ways to convey ideas in such a way as to “provoke a reaction and make people do something.” Igor is facilitating active *thinking* that leads to *doing*. In a similar vein Edisa Demić, critiquing the common societal practice of bribery in Bosnia and Herzegovina through comics, murals, and performances, explains the importance of the *activity* she hopes to generate through her intervention. “Above all,” she states, “our goal was to call people to action -- to raise awareness and ask them to be responsible, not passive, in challenging the corruption in our society...we wanted people to know the next steps they could take... and how they can get engaged.” What is important here is that for Edisa “raising *awareness*” about corruption is linked to “call[ing] people to *action*” to change institutions. For both Edisa and Igor (as well as the other participants in this project) it is not abstract “ideas” or “material conditions” which lead to change, it is people *thinking* about ideas and *doing* something to their material conditions. A diagram incorporating this necessary aspect of human agency looks something like this:



Whereby people, by what they *do* within and to their material environment *think* up ideas and ideals. This *thinking* then guides what they end up *doing* and how they do it. This doing then shapes what they think, the thinking shapes what they do, and so on, ad infinitum.

### ADDING IN EMOTION

So far we have explored two major theories of change: Idealist and Materialist, but a necessary component of creative activism is missing: Emotion. Understanding the power of emotions is critical to any understanding of social change because humans are motivated to act politically, not merely through cognitive reasoning, or in some sort of physical reaction to material circumstances, but because they *feel* the need for change. As the activist trainer and scholar Marshall Ganz points out, people are moved to bring about change by emotionally powerful stimuli, be it love, hate, fear, hope, or compassion.<sup>1</sup> Social movement scholar Deborah Gould elaborates,

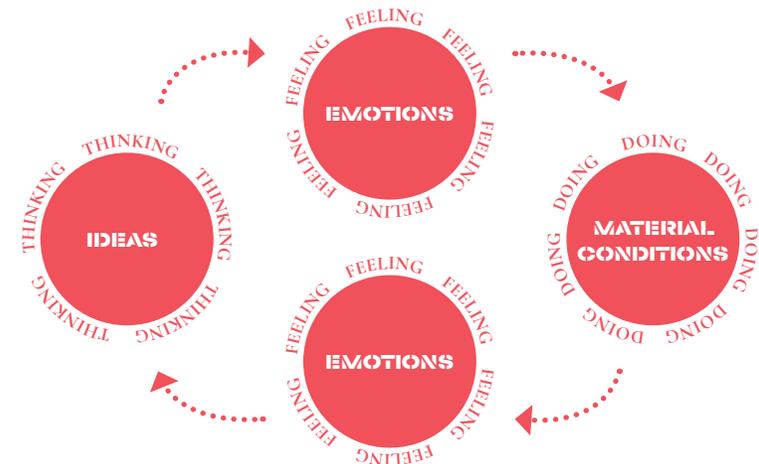
Ideas about the need for change and movement toward bringing it about often begin with an inarticulate and inarticulable sensation that something in the established

order is not quite right. By signaling that something is awry, that things could be and perhaps should be different, affective states can inspire challenges to the social order.<sup>2</sup>

Recognizing the social power of “affective states” is even more important when we are dealing with *creative* activism which draws heavily upon the arts: performance, visual, or musical, for its technique. The power of art is to stimulate emotions, generating powerful feelings that we often can’t quite comprehend or explain. This ability to generate *affect* is the driving force behind creative activism’s ideological and material *effect*. Simply put: art moves us.

Empathy, for instance, is understood by both Akosua Hanson and Maja Kalafatić as important in addressing corruption, and both see art as an important way of manifesting this emotion. Akosua, working in Ghana with young people, uses the collective and artistic creation of a billboard and a performative action as a means of creating what she calls a “space for empathy,” which is essential for creating a “state of empathy” which she believes can combat corruption. Likewise, Maja explains that the purpose of her creative intervention in Serbia -- wherein performers provide acts of kindness like offering chairs or bottles of water or a trip to a shop to the people waiting in queues for official, and often corrupted, services -- was to generate a profound sense of empathy for others within the society. “If there is more empathy, there is less corruption,” Maja reasons.

When Regina writes of her project: “On an emotional level, we also wanted to make people dream,” she captures the importance of the emotional aspect of a theory of change. Dreams -- of a world without corruption, for instance -- are not so much thought or physically experienced, as they are something that people *feel*. (Which is one reason why dreams are so hard to capture in words upon waking). As such, Feeling is as much a part of what constitutes, and directs, human agency as Thinking and Doing. Materialists argue that the first human act is to produce our means of survival, but we light a fire because we *feel* uncomfortable. Idealists may argue that in the beginning was The Word, but we listen because we *feel* it has something to say to us. That is to say, both material conditions and ideas are experienced affectively, as well as bodily and cognitively. As such Emotion is a sort of intermediary stage between the Ideal and the Material, which might be illustrated something like this:



1 — Marshall Ganz, “Public Narrative, Collective Action, and Power,” in *Accountability Through Public Opinion: From Inertia to Public Action*, ed. Sina Odugbemi and Taeku Lee (Washington DC: The World Bank, 2011), 273-289.

2 — Deborah Gould, “On Affect and Protest,” in *Political Emotions*, ed. Janet Staiger, Ann Cvetkovich, and Ann Reynolds, (NY: Routledge, 2010), 32.

In the course of acting within and reacting to material conditions, we experience emotions and develop feelings. We then learn to think these feelings as ideas and represent them through arts, philosophy, religion, and so on, as ideals of what we feel is important and valuable as a society. These cultural ideals then guide and motivate us -- or, more accurately stimulate us to *feel* motivated -- to change our material conditions, and the circle goes round again.

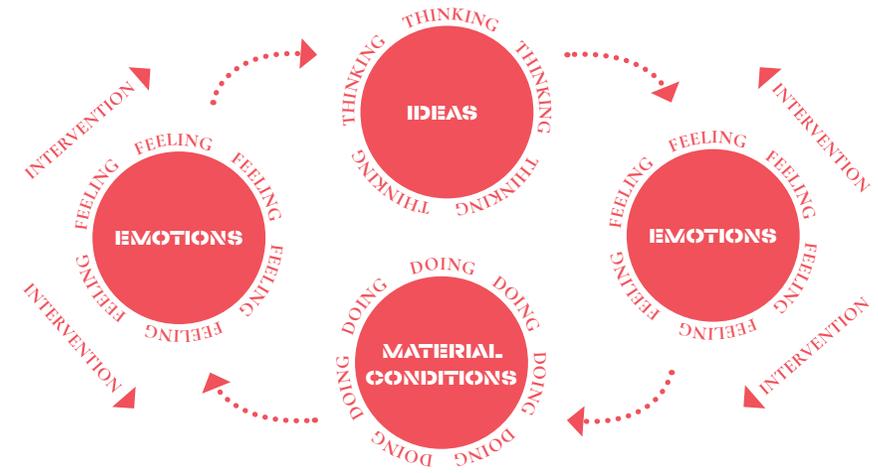
### A CREATIVE ACTIVIST THEORY OF CHANGE

The model above accounts for the three primary forces of change and their interrelationship, but it is not yet a useful Theory of Social Change. In order for it to become useful for the study and practice of creative activism we need to locate the pressure points: those spaces and places where the creative activist intervenes in order to generate change. This was the advantage of the unidirectional Materialist and Idealist models -- they gave clear direction. If one holds to a materialist theory of social change then the point of intervention is at the level of material conditions: seize the factories! An Idealist, on the other hand, would emphasize the production and dissemination of ideas: take control of the media! But what is the entry point for a creative activist?

Beginning with an idea of change, the creative activist gives this ideal cultural form through creative expression. In so doing, they turn an abstraction into an aesthetic experience that can generate feelings. This process is what Regina is describing when she says, "It's as if we were the people who lived there, who knew exactly the problems of the area, and we were able to materialize that." Through her creative activism, Regina and her team were able to take an idea -- "the problems of the area" -- and "materialize" them through a dramatic performance in a public market. This transmutation of ideas into creative cultural expression is important. Unlike a news article, report, or law statute, creative activism does not just communicate ideas -- it also generates emotion, and it is this animation of ideas through emotion that motivates people to directed action. As Igor explains, "it's not just about relaying information, but the emphasis is on promoting the action that prompts engagement with the issues."

This is not the only process of change at work here. Creative activism can also begin with lived experience. The creative activist then takes that experience and gives it cultural expression -- heightening, distilling, and defining the feelings the experience evokes. As Mahamadou describes it, "It is as if [the people] see a reality, they find themselves in this reality, and it touches them." This is what Maja is creating with her "shit-mobile" in giving visceral -- and smelly -- form to the experience of municipal corruption. This is also what Edisa does by retelling the common experience of corruption in hospitals, schools, and the legal systems in a comic book, conveying "how small [corruption] makes us feel" but also "that everyone standing together is what can shrink him down and defeat him." This aestheticized experience then creates new understanding, perspectives, and visions: that is new ideas and ideals.

In sum, the intervention of the creative activist occurs somewhere between ideas and emotions, and emotions and material conditions:



The process works something like this. We can start with our environment, which includes corrupt schools, crumbling municipal projects, roads that received funding but were never paved, etc. These are the "material conditions" in which we live. Living is active, it is doing, and, because we are emotional beings, living is also our feelings about what we are doing and what is being done to us. This is one of the points creative activism can make an intervention. Artistic activism can crystalize the feelings that arise from material experience into a cultural form so they can be represented, recognized, generalized...and communicated. In capturing and communicating feelings it enables their abstraction into ideas and ideals that can be thought about and eventually act upon.

We can also view this process from the starting point of ideas. Humans are doers and feelers, but we are also very much thinkers: generating critiques of the world and ideals of the world we'd like to see. Here is another place where the creative activist can intervene: aestheticizing these ideas and ideals through creative interventions like dramatic performances, musical sessions, and visual spectacles. Giving these ideas cultural form, creative activism transforms abstract ideas into aesthetic experiences that can be felt. These feelings, in turn, motivate actions within and upon the material world.

We now have a general theory of change for creative activism, but it is just that: a *theory*. In practice, the creative activists of the Regional Creative Hubs project intervened at different points in this model, some stressing the animation of ideas into felt experiences, whereas others began with experiences before transforming them into felt ideas. And all of the participants in this project shaped their projects to fit (or consciously rub up against) local beliefs, practices, and cultures. Yet theories are important. By theorizing how a practice works we learn how to make it work better and having a theory of change for creative activism allows us to create more affective and effective, or æffective, interventions that are more likely to bring about change.



01

© RCH: “An Enemy of the People”, Albania, 2021

02

© RCH: “Freedom to the Rivers, Bosnia and Herzegovina”, 2021

03

© RCH: #MakeWeTalkTheMatter '21, Ghana, 2021

04

© RCH: “Projet d’Activisme Artistique contre la Corruption (PAAC)”, Senegal, 2021

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06

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07

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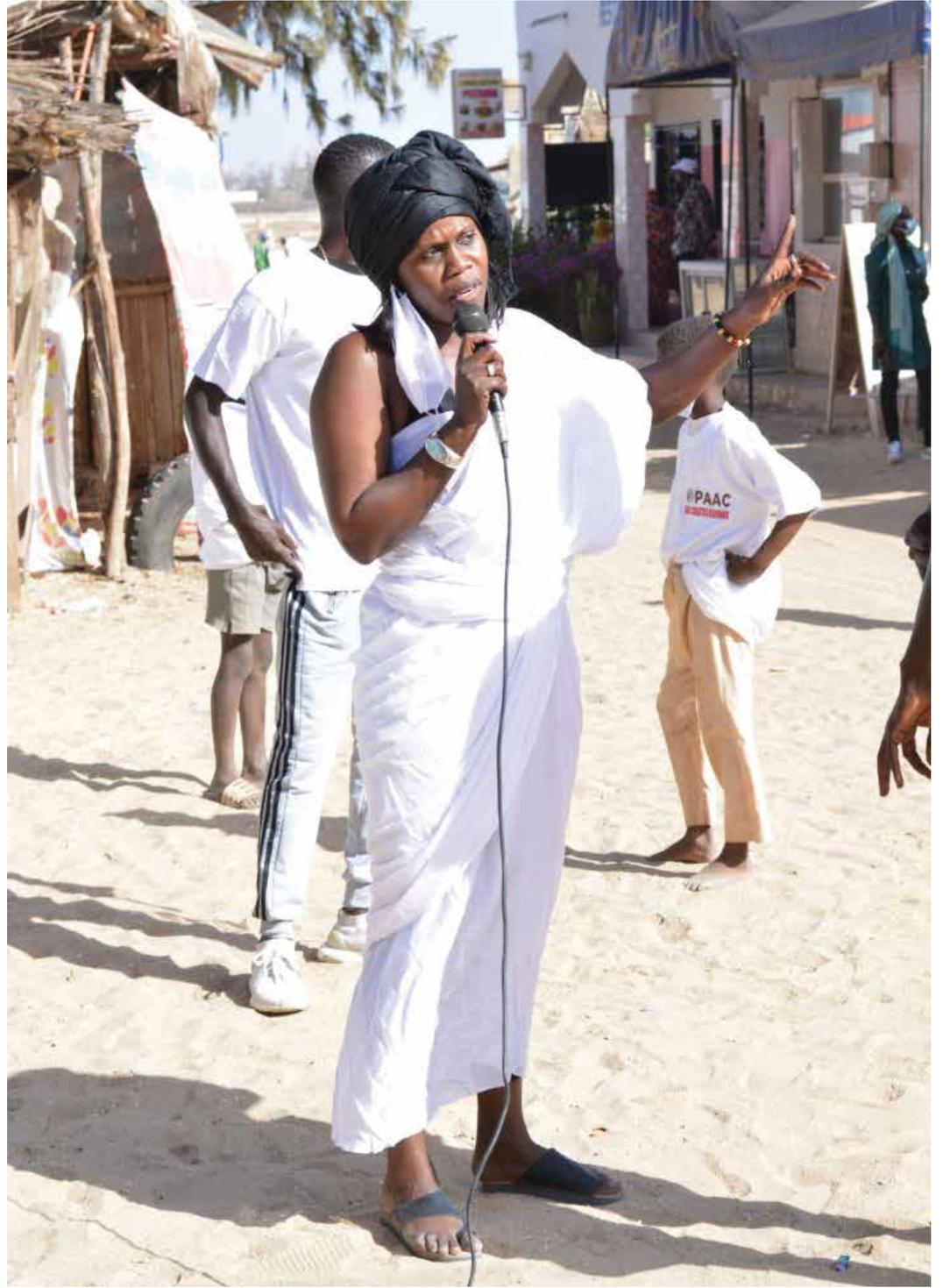
08

© RCH: “Creative Anti-Corruption Alarm”, Albania, 2021



















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# CASE STUDY DESCRIP- TIONS

## WEST AFRICA

Nana Akosua Hanson (Ghana)  
Mahamadou Cellou Diallo (Guinea)  
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## WESTERN BALKANS

Edisa Demić (Bosnia and Herzegovina)  
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Jeta Pera (Albania)  
Maja Kalafatić (Serbia)

CASE STUDY  
DESCRIPTIONS  
WEST AFRICA

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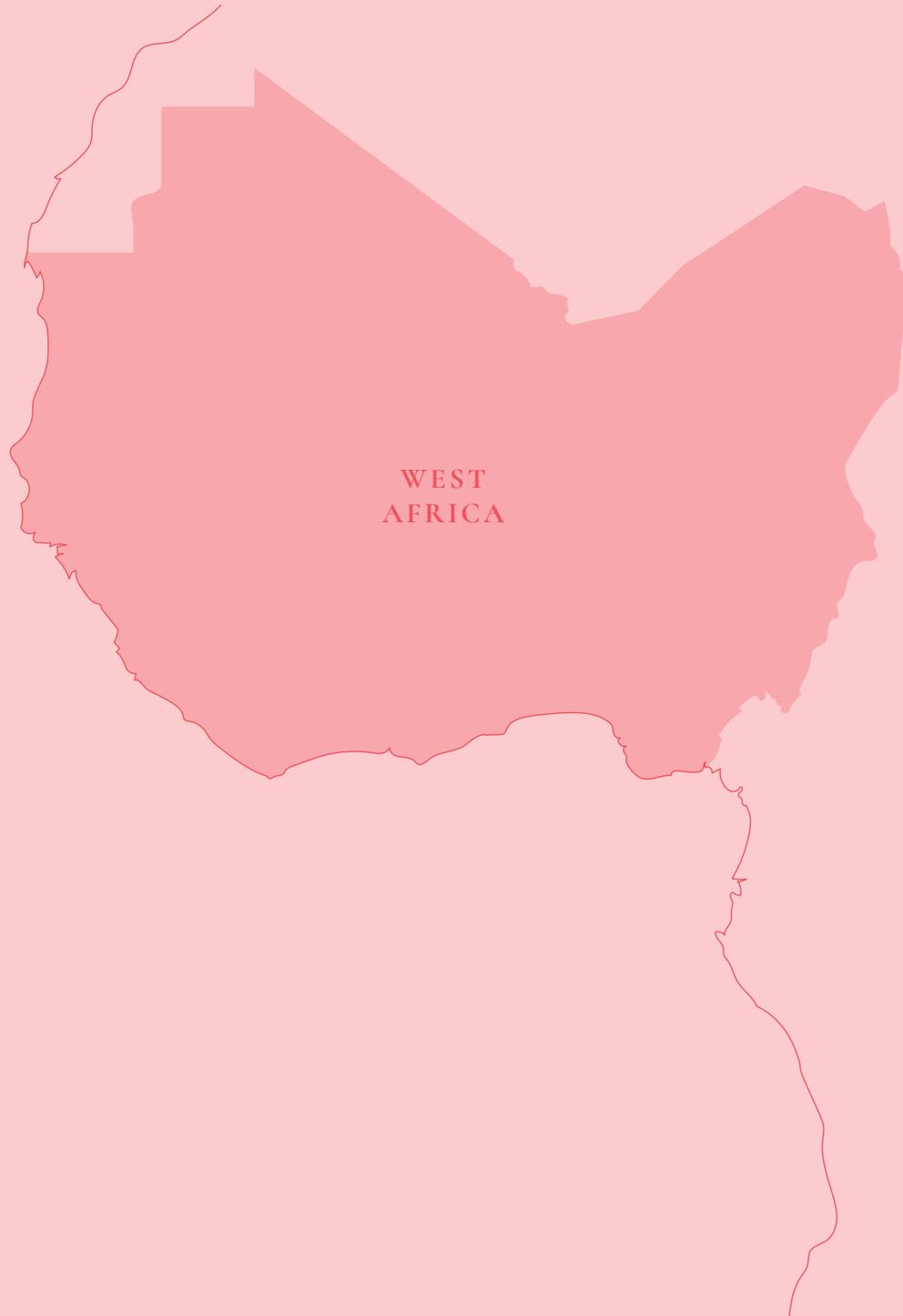
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## NANA AKOSUA HANSON

Nana Akosua Hanson is the creator of the thrilling and philosophical Ghanaian graphic novel series, *Moongirls*, which follows the adventures of African queer superheroes fighting for an Africa free from corruption, patriarchy, the legacies of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism. With 12 years of experience as an artistic activist, Akosua Hanson believes in the power of art and artistic expression in changing the world. She also works as a radio presenter at an urban radio station, Y 107.9 FM in Accra. Akosua runs Artistic Activism workshops in Accra for artists, activists, journalists, human rights defenders and social justice warriors.

The *Moongirls* Artistic Activism workshop was designed to train human rights defenders, activists, artists, journalists and anyone with a passion for social change in the methodology of using artistic activism for social justice movements. This workshop was a 7-day, in-person workshop training that cut across various social justice movements: Free and fair Democratic processes, fighting corruption, women's rights, LGBTQI+ rights, environmental corruption and degradation, equity & social inclusion, art, African history, etc.

Through a public call out and direct invitations to human rights organizations, artists, activists and journalists in the community to apply, 9 participants were selected. Post workshop, participants separated into two main groups to execute two community actions. One group undertook the Fishing Plastics Project aimed at starting conversations on the harm of plastic in our environment through the use of satirical art. This group mounted a billboard with satirical art in a busy marketplace. The second group did an action on the corrupt erasure of women's contributions to the Independence struggle in Ghanaian history through the means of an educational workshop in a Senior Girls' High School.

**Tell me a little bit about you, yourself first and then your passions and your work.**

I've always been a very passionate person. I started to explain my passion through the arts, specifically through poetry and writing and creative writing, and eventually that found its way into the theater and acting. And as I grew with that, I also started to evolve in all other forms but essentially, I've always been an idealist. My advocacy becomes activism. My passion is in the arts and I guess the reason behind everything I do is my heart - my philosophy, my values and how I do things beyond just me. It's why I'm active in the community.

For work, I'm a media personality. I work as a radio host of the Y Lounge of YFM based in Ghana. YFM is an urban radio station for youth [focused on] culture, music, entertainment, youth topics, and youth social issues. Aside from that, I am also currently working as the head of culture of Alliance Française in Ghana, and I'm the creator of MoonGirls which is now established as a very young company to produce MoonGirls graphic novels.

**What would you say are the political issues that drive you the most?**

I'm a feminist, so feminism and fighting patriarchy in all its forms drives everything I do. I've specifically done work around rape and consent which was how I started work around sexual violence. I realized we had no sex education in the current programs in schools and recently, as we've seen, they actively try to stop comprehensive sexual education in schools due to other bigoted reasons. I realized there hasn't been healthy, wholesome sexual education in schools, so I started this program called the "Let's Talk Consent" workshop, which is based on gender and gender theory, about rape culture and consent culture. We run these workshops in high schools, universities, and public spaces that built on other things, including activism for sexual minorities and against homophobia in Ghana.

Eventually arts became the center of it, because I realized that art is the great space for cultural education that you find when you are dealing with communities that are steeped in patriarchy. It's almost like hitting a brick wall often, because of the miseducation and prejudice that is taught to you from birth. So we found art as the escape, as the place for imagination, truth-telling and self-reflection.

**Can you give me a broad description of your project?**

The first part of it was done through the MoonGirls graphic novel series. We raised the conversation on corruption using the medium of digital graphic novels, visual image and text, and social media, and after that [by] running an artistic activism workshop. It was one week immersed in studying what artistic activism is, why artistic activism is relevant, especially in these times when our democracy and human rights are challenged, and when the gains that were made have been pulled back.

The participants then instituted their own specific project – one about raising awareness around plastic pollution and our environment, and another raising awareness on what we call "educational corruption or historical corruption" where women are erased from the history that we tell in Ghana of how we won our independence. The Four Mothers of our nation are excluded from our history, which has consequences in perpetrating violence against women, because that is violence against women by erasing them from history.

**What would you say is the relationship between the project that you did and the historical socio-political context that you are working in?**

Ghana is seen as a peaceful beacon of democracy. However, the reality is that it is a country steeped heavily in corruption and in human rights abuses, largely driven by religious fundamentalists who propagate hate and who have huge influence in societal norms, as well as in constitutional reform and laws and legal reform. This is an environment where violence against women and sexual minorities is encouraged to thrive. The importance of a project like this is to show other activists new and more innovative ways of activism in places where you can easily get imprisoned or made to face some kind of abuse or violence for standing up for what's right. Some participants of the workshops are also heads of their own organizations, some individual activists, and so training these people was a great way to get them to reflect on the problems in our country and how they can solve them, as well as what change is going to really look like, and how to measure progress.

**How would you say the context that you are working in influenced the way that you did your project - whether it is the media that you chose, the language that you use with the participants, the references that you used?**

Because I was working with African activists, I definitely had to contextualize a lot of the content of the curriculum for the African audience. I pulled on the Ghanaian references to give an example of friends of artistic activism in history. I also did some research on workshop enhancements to try to get the best experience, to try to create the best experience for the participants, so that they would leave the workshop fully empowered with the skills they wanted to have as they go out in the community to do the work they are doing.

I also included a curriculum on ethics in community activism, and this was important for me because having been in the Ghanaian activist community, I've become a spectator to a lot of abuse of ethics and integrity that happens within, even within activist spaces and that in itself is huge violence. People who claim to be activists for a specific group endangering that group in their quest to protect them, often not deliberately. So, including that in my curriculum was very, very important to me, and even that was made very Africanized. I lead an exercise about values and integrity, and what are African cultural stories, and what African philosophy actually says about the ideas of ethics and being oppressed in community, being fruitful, being productive, being contributing and active citizen in your community, so that you do not perpetrate the harm that you are seeking to fight.

**What is your history with the work that you were doing with the project and how did you think about the idea for your project?**

I have been doing this since I was 16 when I started Drama Queens and started to use theater and other artistic forms to raise conversation to try to bring viral change. I decided to use the MoonGirls graphic novel as my project, and I chose that because I have done a lot of work for a year and I wanted to still tap into that audience to be able to raise that conversation. Also, using digital graphic novels for activism hasn't really been done... at least not in Ghana. We have graphic novels, we have comics, but specific digital graphic novels geared towards artistic activism... I haven't seen that yet. I wanted to fill in that space, and when COVID hit and everything moved online, it became a very sensible decision.

### Who was your primary audience and how were interactions with them?

My primary audience was the youth, Africans ... and our interactions were largely through social media and our digital websites. We post the graphic novels online, on a website, and then we pick specific excerpts for our Instagram and our Twitter to begin conversations. The workshops were publicized on social media, however I also did direct invitations to activist organizations in the community, and sent it to not just organizations but also to activists. I tried to get a group of 8 people who had different skills or different drives and values, different projects they were working on as to be able to create that space for cross-sharing.

### What would you say were the goals of this project both in terms of political impact and emotional impact?

My goal for this project was first of all, to learn, learn from people who have been doing this for longer than I have and have actually had practice. And then, also it was to be able to network with other artistic activists who were doing the kind of work outside the circles I was used to... it was great to meet them and to know that there is this global network of change-makers, who are also passionate for doing this work. For me, it gave me more political strength and in that sense also further boosted my political drive for changing society, for encouraging an African society free from patriarchy, free from human rights abuses, from violence.

I feel I've definitely grown in my perspective: I feel more validated in what I do, I feel even more the relevance of what I do and why I do it. I cherish even more now the fact that I'm not the only one in this and that it was great to find out that other people have problems that are similar to yours, just a different context. So, definitely emotional growth, emotional expansion, skills expansion, mind expansion which I think in the long run is hugely beneficial to my country and my continent because I do believe we all have to be active citizens and not passive ones.

### In what ways did your project achieve the goals that you set for yourself?

#### And in what way did you achieve them? What failures did you encounter?

Part of the workshop was successful in the sense that we had 8 to 9 participants who were themselves very instrumental in their communities, so it was great to have them all for a week in one space, just sharing and reflecting what they do. We did an evaluation of the participants before and after, and the feedback we got from the participants was very, very positive – they all attested to growth and expansion and skills post the workshop.

As for failures, we tried to keep an online channel for people who want to join us online, however, that was difficult because of the internet problems across the continent. So, people tried to join from other parts of the continent, but not all of them were able to stay throughout the whole event. With the projects, I'm still trying to find a way to create an action or series of actions that would lead from awareness to a behavioral change to actual identity, and that I don't think I have reached yet. I feel like it's ongoing work.

### How do you see the relationship between the creative process of activism and making social change?

Art has a way of going beyond what we perceive as a mountain, or as too difficult to go beyond. Art is a way of bringing people to a state of empathy. Artistic activism gives you that space for empathy, and using that space for education gives you that space for reflec-

tion and also allows you to play with those parts of the mind where you often are trapped by prejudices that were given to you from birth. Those are sometimes the biggest barriers to fighting change, where someone's beliefs, which are actually not facts, are made facts and therefore the person becomes harmful and violent in that society. Art gives you the opportunity to dislodge that, it shakes you a little bit, and if it shakes you a little bit, that's all you need because it then tells you if this is shakable, that this is not a fact, this is a belief, this is programming. I love the power that art gives and provides for social change in this way.

### What was your experience of working with your participants?

#### And were you happy with how they worked together and what they learned?

We had a selection process that came out from the public call for applications via social media. Direct invitations were also made to human rights organizations, artists, activists and journalists in the community. Selections were made based on the need for the skill sharing workshop, the applicant's general vision as expressed in the application, previous history of work within the community, and also a need for diverse representation of people and skills.

For some of them, they've been doing artistic actions, but didn't know about it as a practice, so being part of the workshop gave meaning to what they did and also connected their work to previous historical examples of artistic activism. After the workshop, 71.4% of the group said they gained a lot of new knowledge, and 14.3% of the people said that they actually gained a new perspective, not just new knowledge, but a new perspective.

### How would you say your perspective shifted over the course of implementation of your project?

I have realized that it's very difficult to move people from awareness to identity. I've always felt that you need to do a series of actions and it never stops there, you need to have an audience that's been following you for a while to build it up. I can give you evidence of markers and change with people who've been following my artistic activism since 2016 as opposed to people who just saw the one action I did as part of this program. People who had been through the theater productions I've done, people who have come to the workshops, people who follow my social media, people who read the comic books...

For me personally, I feel greatly expanded by the workshop. I now call myself an artistic activist. I didn't really engage with the label as much before because I don't think I knew it as much. I think it also built my profile publicly; moving into a position of skill sharing always grows you because community always needs more people to share more skills.

### If you were to do this project again, how would you do it differently?

I would definitely give more time for my actions to grow an audience, to be able to mark their growth. Doing one of actions and having to report immediately kind of stifles the process you want to capture. I would also maybe give more resources and time towards monitoring the change.



## OUMY RÉGINA SAMBOU

Since 2017, Oumy Régina Sambou has devoted herself to her passions of culture and writing through the pan-African platform “Africulturelle” of which she is the founder and editor. Today, in addition to the cultural information website, AfriCulturelle is also a communication agency that offers several services related to communication and event organization. Committed to the cause of women, she is in charge of communication for the Ladies Club, an online platform that campaigns for the empowerment of women and the development of female entrepreneurship.

Régina’s project, The Project of Artistic Activism against Corruption (PAAC), aimed to train young activists, cultural actors, journalists and bloggers on the instruments of prevention and fight against corruption. It is a continuation from her previous project, Art Action Academy. The aim of the project was not simply to disseminate knowledge, but to empower artists, activists and journalists to be more effective in their efforts to stimulate people’s engagement on corruption issues and open up perspectives on significant synergies associating several themes and geographic areas.

The workshop took place over 7 days in a commune called Lac Rose. In Lac Rose there is a lot of corruption within land management, as well as land disputes, and Senegalese losing their land from under them. She invited one of the coordinators of the Senegalese civil forum Birahim Seck to lead a module on corruption, its definition, and these different forms observed in Senegal. She also involved Cheikh Fall, the coordinator of Afritivist, to lead a session on civic engagement. At the end of the workshop the participants carried out an artistic action in which there was rap (music), theater and dance.

The project has made it possible to put “Lac Rose”, a neglected tourist area, back at the center of attention. PAAC activities have helped boost the commitment of the residents in the area to fighting ongoing corruption.

### Can you tell me a little about yourself, your passions, your work, who you are?

I am a cultural journalist and a very versatile person. I am also an entrepreneur. I would also say I am an artistic activist, since my participation in this program in December 2019. In my everyday life, I organize a lot of events and I write a lot on micro-blogging platforms that I still maintain. I do a lot of freelance work with my various media outlets. I love to share too. This is one of my great passions because I find that any knowledge that one can have and that one keeps in oneself is useless. The point is to pass the knowledge to as many people as possible.

### Could you give a brief description of your project?

My project allows people to discover a new form of combat that can be used in all areas. In this case, it was within the framework of the fight against corruption. I had to select different personalities in several fields as diverse as possible. Hence, I made a selection of very different individuals, sometimes very much in opposition. And for me the biggest challenge is to ensure that we managed to have a certain consistency, a certain homogeneity and that they can effectively understand, what is artistic activism, how it can be used in everyday life, beginning with the fight against corruption. We chose an area in which Senegal plans to create a specialized economic zone -- an area which is a tourist base. When there is this kind of state project there are always a lot of corruption around it. So, that was our main motivation in choosing that location.

It is as if all people were just waiting for this. This kind of project unleashed the languages. We really achieved the goals we wanted. It is far from suspecting that all this crisis was about the land. And it is our project that really helped empower those who were there, especially in their fight against the theft of the land, which is happening on a large scale.

### What motivated you to participate in the program?

This program was linked with a program in which I participated in 2010. We had followed a training for one month within the framework of the fight against corruption, in the task for analysis of documents as a journalist. It was my status that brought me to this workshop. How can I ensure that I can talk about the facts related to corruption, to be able to condemn them based on most of the administrative documents produced by many administrative services in our country? And at the end of this training, we talked a lot about the need, especially given my cultural profile, to limit the project on the realm of culture, because that could make sense.

The project is an instrument for taking a view through culture. Something like the distinction between nature and culture, nature is all that is of the innate order, and culture is all that is in the order of the acquis. And culture is absolutely everything.

### Who was your main audience, how were your interactions with them?

Mainly, I was looking for motivated, committed young people who were engaged in the fight for good governance, and who were socially involved in their communities. My other audience were those who are impacted by the corruption in the area where we planned to act. Our interactions happened in a natural way, and the initiative was welcomed by the audiences we had targeted. They understood the messages we intended to pass, and saw it as an opportunity for them to increase their efforts to fight against corruption and against land grabbing in their area.

### Can you share about the relationship between your project and the historical, social, political context in which you work?

We are aware that in Senegal there is a real land grabbing problem, especially in the areas that we had targeted as part of our project -- primarily in the seaside resorts like Saly. That is where we would have the most impact, for example the area of Ndayane, which is a harbor for export of minerals. And it is not by chance that we had the contact of a hotel in an area. When we looked for information about the hotel and the advantages that we can have and the activities that we would do there, we realized that it is also an area where there are a lot of land grabbing problems. And on several occasions, we went there scouting, analyzing how things are going in the community and listening to people discussing in an informal way. It was necessary to have a place that was accessible, that the hotel does not cost us much including all the amenities that we can have around.

### In terms of the media selected, how did this affect the way you carried out your project?

The media we chose was not complicated. With most of the tools provided by Siphon and the language we used, we included a mixture of French and Wolof. We made it much more accessible by involving other organizations. We made sure that the training could be diversified and that it would fully meet the expectations. We relied more on our knowledge than on the content that was displayed in the slideshows and the mainstream culture that we used. We also made significant changes because the mainstream culture for the Balkans is not necessarily the mainstream culture for Senegalese, as it is not the same for Guineans or for or for Ghanaians with a few variations. And considering that at this moment there is a strong dose of African culture, and a certain rejection of anything that revolves around western concepts. We tried to bring another perspective, as our participants also came with their constraints too, with their vision which sometimes did not fit. But thanks to exchanges, we were able to forge links and this is what allowed us to be able to develop our project successfully.

### Can you speak a little bit about your impact?

Our impact for this project is making all our participants aware of what artistic activism is. We saw our aim as mobilizing individuals around the ongoing battles against corruption, reinvigorating them, and giving them a boost to refresh and really re-motivate. And on an emotional level, we also wanted to make people dream -- there is this playful and fun side to artistic activism as well.

During our intervention, my trainees had initially chosen a place where there were no people, meaning that there was no audience. They decided to go seek out a more public place, in the market. I had some anxiety about this, since we did it without notifying the authorities or anything, but it went smoothly. And so, it was in the central square that these trainees were doing their performance. They were surrounded by traders in the middle of the public, and all around us we heard their comments, how enthusiastic they were. They had forgotten all their businesses and they were commenting on what these young people were doing. It was truly a beautiful impact.

### How did you plan your project in order to achieve your outlined goals?

It was important to me to ensure that everything went well logistically. One of my main goals was to give these young people the power to set up their own project. We tried to



sensitize one or two participants, to make them aware of the work that we will ask them to perform until the end of the project. And then we disseminated the knowledge we were supposed to share. We brought in our experts and the others. From the moment they understood the stakes, they took ownership of the project – creating their own communication channels through WhatsApp, for example. This to me was proof of success, that they felt ownership of the project.

### How do you perceive the relationship between creative and artistic approaches to activism and social change?

For me, it is the panacea, a cure. I take the testimony of one of my participants as a good example, who is very dynamic in the associative environment, and who told us that this training taught her a lot of things, especially with the modules on transformational leadership that she had to do. She found herself talking with directors, rappers, and all that allows us to have another approach. This workshop allowed her to reveal her artistic side, which she did not dare to do elsewhere. She was able to really get out of her comfort zone. Because most of the cultural actors that I had are people who are convinced that with culture they can move mountains and therefore they were already convinced. They managed to convince the more than half who were not from the cultural background, that activism, that creative and artistic approaches to activism and social change can really bear fruit that everyone can benefit from.

### How have the authorities and governments reacted to your actions?

We did everything without the knowledge of the authorities, because one of our fears was in the context of COVID we would be prohibited from doing our activities or that we would be asked for different protocols, whether it is about obtaining various documents, or to meet several authorities. La Grosse is an area where there are several municipalities that surround the area and there are several local communities. We instead focused on garnering the support of the hotel staff. It is above all that - those who were mobilized in the fight against land grabbing at Lac Rose. They heard about the project and joined us at the hotel to discuss and interact with us.

### How was your experience of working with your participants?

It was a great human adventure. At the beginning I was very worried because I had planned to make a call for applications. But afterwards I realized that the call for applications would not guarantee absolutely anything; I chose instead to target several associations and asked the leaders to recommend committed young people who are curious and who like to learn. I had to make a selection from 30 names and make sure to maintain a certain balance, especially in terms of gender, and also ensured that there were people who have knowledge in the development of a project, there are people who have artistic knowledge.

## MAHAMADOU CELLOU DIALLO

Mahamadou Cellou is an activist working in the field of environmental protection as well as in the fight against climate change, which is why he has participated in several international meetings on climate such as the COY11 and COP21 in Paris in 2015 and the COP22 in Marrakech in 2016.

Mahamadou Cellou is the Coordinator of the NGO SAVE OUR ISLANDS and member of some national and international platforms that work for the rights of communities to land and water. Nowadays he uses artistic activism to denounce, raise awareness and educate.

Mahamadou recruited journalists, artists and activists to participate in his project. The training took place over the course of a week, during which he gave theoretical lessons with projection and had practical work sessions to allow them to put into practice the lessons learned, and also facilitate the organization of the final cultural activity that was planned to occur on the last day of the training in a public space in the city center.

To date, his interns are carrying out their artistic projects to fight against corruption in a given sector. Some go through forum theater or by showing debate films, others through online campaigns, others with graffiti. One of his interns even produced a documentary film on corruption in the health sector and which screening was performed at Kirah Studios. The film is now under consideration for translation into multiple languages.

**Can you tell us a bit about who you are, what your passions are, and what you are working on?**

I come from Guinea, and have been working on this project for two years. Apart from that, I am working a lot on projects related to the protection of the environment. I have carried out many projects. I work in some projects as a consultant. I am very passionate about everything related to activism and everything related to environmental protection.

This raised a passion in me about the fight against corruption; before this project I had never worked on corruption issues. I began to understand a little bit about the problems we are facing, what are the evils of corruption, all that corruption can lead to in a country, all that is identified as a problem. This project allowed me to see that corruption exists almost everywhere, which prevents certain sectors of society from functioning better, which prevents certain projects from having a better impact on the community because it is everywhere, including questions related to the environment, environmental protection, production issues, good governance. And all this is really fascinating for me.

**Could you give me a short description of your project?**

This project is not a simple anti-corruption project through artistic activism. During this project I had to train eight people - journalists, artists, and activists. This project was intended for those people who do these activities and the objective is to provide them with another way of activism.

Through this project, we manage to pass the message, we manage to communicate, we manage to create an impact to the people. In this project, we carried out actions in this field not only as a theoretical training of how it is done, but we also performed practical actions. And why are these practical actions? When we perform them with our trainees, we first go through the investigation stage. First you have to know what is the problem, what causes it, and what are the consequences of the problems, as well as who are the victims. And so, when we find out that, we now come to the grassroots level and we try to find a strategy how can we implement our action, can we do it through music, or it is something that can be done through art?

We are trying to find out what the community likes, the culture of this community. If they like the theater, we can also go through the theater to make an impact on them. If they like music, we organize a mini concert where we pass our message. It is good to do it where the corruption is done. If it's at the market, it's good to do it at the edge of the market. If it is at the level of a ministry, it must be done in front of the ministry, because people stand on the face of the place. It is as if they see a reality, they find themselves in this reality and it touches them. People start to understand what we are doing.

When we do an artistic action, we ask the people: What do you want us to do? You will see, they will find the solution themselves. And sometimes that result is that some people want to join the association, in order to be able to claim their rights because before they did not know they had rights. And now they know they have rights.

In short, this project is a project to fight corruption through culture. First, to fight like that, you first have to denounce corruption, show it that it exists, discover it with the people, the victims, and together try to find solution for the problem. We don't do it in a violent way, but we do it in an artistic way, whether it's called graffiti, theater, etc. It's a way of being an activist without getting into trouble. Usually when we do this kind of action,

we try to have all the necessary authorizations and we invite those who give them to come. And when they come, they find themselves in the theater or often in the drawing that is hung on the wall, it raises awareness, it educates, and it pushes the people into action.

**What is the link between the project you did and the historical, social and political context in which you work?**

In this country, people find it normal to pay for a government service. This is what has been in place for a long time. For example, to make a passport you need 500,000 Guinean francs, but we tell you that it is faster, give 200,000 or 500,000 again so that you have your passport. The first 500,000 you pay them to the bank, but the other 500,000 so that you have it quickly you pay them on the ground. So it doesn't go in the state fund but into the pocket of the person to whom you gave the money. Today people pay for the grades in the schools, at universities we pay for exams; can you imagine a student paying to take a higher course or to have their exams, what kind of person will they actually be? And yet, it has become a norm. My son didn't graduate because I couldn't pay for him to graduate. We tend to normalize that. This is normal, yet it is not normal, it should not happen like that. So taking action to disclose this is actually not easy to talk about corruption because you can get in trouble. And today in Guinea, we have even created an agency responsible for the fight against corruption. It's important to say that it exists, but why did we create this agency? How to talk about this? The best way for us, this project is welcome. That's why I'm enthusiastic about this project, but today we manage to create a debate through it, debate through the theater, music, drawing and all that. So, the agent who does that, we can invite him to come and see what we are doing. If we take action on road corruption, for example, we can invite road police to come. See, you ask them why they're doing it and they show you information you didn't have.

**What motivates you, and why did you want to participate in the project?**

First, it was about corruption. I had never worked on issues related to corruption, and I was wondering how I, as an activist, will work with artists and journalists on the same project, on a same topic. At first it was out of curiosity, I wanted to learn something new. I needed a new breath in my activism -- that is to say I was looking for another inspiration. It came to me at an important moment -- at a time when I wanted to learn things, I wanted to get engaged on top of what I was doing in another area. And, it helped me a lot, I learned a lot, and I still continue to learn through this project.

**How did the context in which you ran the project influence the way you performed it?**

When we talk about corruption we think that it's only at the state level, that it is only the state that causes corruption, but we forget that corruption is anchored everywhere. Now, how can we disclose this? First of all you have to find the context, why this corruption exists. That is the reason why it is very important to do investigations, research to find out what we are getting into. How you present your findings depends on your audience. For instance, my audience are people who have not studied, market women, market traders. Generally they speak either the Soussou language, or the language of the corridor, of the people. Hence most of my actions are much more in the local language and a small part

in French. Because I don't want to do an activity where people come and follow and don't get the message, that doesn't make sense then. Therefore, research and language are very important for the different actions that I carry out in the field.

### What is your past relationship with this type of artistic activism work and with the community in which you worked?

#### What inspired you to think about this particular project?

Before this I had never worked on the issue of corruption. I worked more with issues related to environmental protection, reforestation, environmental education in schools, and after the training in Dakar, we had to work on a small project about fight against corruption and there I got a friend. One morning she approached me and told me that I could take an interest in the corruption in the market. She encouraged me to go ahead, and to get interested about corruption topic. When I went on my own and entered that world that I didn't understand, since I had no connection with the market, I didn't go to the market. I went there with a team that accompanied me in this project to ask, raise awareness, listen, get the point of view of people, the itinerant market, those who have no place to live in. I came to really understand that corruption is everywhere in our country, even where we don't actually think it is. I didn't think you could do that, that corruption existed even at the lowest level of the ladder in fact, for me corruption was at the state level.

### Who was your primary audience and what interactions did you have with that audience?

My main audience were the market vendors, the market administration, the town hall, and some civil society actors that I invited and who work on these corruption issues. Also some artists, friends of mine. After the action they also understood that there are other really interesting subjects for debate different than the political question. And as an interaction first before the action I conducted surveys, I met certain women, certain men, certain market managers, certain city hall officials, these are people who have always welcomed me.

### What goals did you set for yourself in terms of political impact and in terms of emotional impact? What impact did you want to have on people's emotions?

My first goal was to shed light on the corruption that is happening at the lowest level. It was to tell people that when we talk about corruption, they shouldn't think it's only at the top of state level. Let's raise awareness and locate the victims of the corruption, who often don't know their own rights. If they knew their rights they would have joined an association or a group to disclose and claim their rights. So, for me the goal was to disclose this corruption, to bring it to the light in the public sphere.

On the emotional side, I would say it was my first time to work on these issues, especially with these women. Listening to them still hurts you a bit when you see that they pay twice or three times for the same service, and this service is never guaranteed, and when they do not pay they are kicked out. And when the women tell you: I was kicked out from there, I don't know where to go, I don't have enough to feed my family, it pushes you to go even further because it can't go on like this. But this corruption, it is the basis of almost all misfortunes. If it did not exist a lot of things should have changed, but since it is there

and that everyone thinks of their bread and butter to the detriment of the people, since the people are not able to form a coalition to be able to fight, first to disclose and then to fight, it's complicated in fact.

### How did you plan the project to achieve these objectives and in what way did the project achieve the objectives you set for yourself, and in what way did it fail sometimes?

First, I did a lot on the planning of my actions before going out on the ground. When I completed the form for my selection, I started working on the module that I had to present, which includes information about the communication, the banners, the rental of the hotel. I published an online call for applications so we can recruit the profiles. Those who were interested signed up and I had 47 applicants for 8 places. So the choice was not easy, you had to preselect, select, do interviews to be able to find the right people who will have to signed up for the training that was supposed to take place in Conakry one week later. I really had to work a lot on this, find a training assistant, prepare whatever is needed.

We had to plan every single step. I had my timetable with me from the beginning until the delivery of certificates, until the execution of the actions of the people I have trained. I realized that my project has achieved the objectives. All the boxes that had to be filled in have been completed. Now there comes the time when you have to review certain strategies. For instance, at the beginning we wanted to do the activity as we wanted to do it, not far from the target location. But we realized that it was better to find a space where people can come, not to move too much. We had to change some stuff two days before the cultural activity. But when I see in the review all the steps that I planned, they were executed as they should.

I don't know if I can call it a failure, but some trainees were not able at first to come up with ideas for the actions on the ground. I told them that they were going to have to come up with an idea that talks about corruption but which is based on real facts and not something imaginary. At first it was difficult for some trainees who couldn't work individually, because when they are in a group they are more motivated. But together we managed to find ideas, we created a group to talk about it and to center and support people, to see the strategies how they were going to carry out the actions and together we were able to do it.

### How do you see the relationship between creative and artistic approaches to activism and social change, and why in this particular case you wanted to use artistic activism rather than other activist strategies?

Art activism is based on culture, in fact, it is art. For me, artistic activism should be the norm in all matters of awareness. You cannot come to Guinea for example to sensitize people who do not speak your language. You don't know the language, you don't know the culture. They will listen to you, yes, but what are they going to do the next step? Often, we take people in the community itself to spread the message. But otherwise, creatively, often we make them laugh by telling the truth, we manage to make you understand certain things that you did not understand. So, going through culture to touch hearts, going through culture to change the mentality, going through the culture of this community in order to be able to pass the message, to get people to initiate actions on their own in order to be able to fight against the corruption.



I think artistic activism is going to be the norm in the long run. I admired the fact that in my country most of the activists used this method. Often, we have experienced too many violent demonstrations in Guinea and the message was never passed. Because every time the police come, people are ransacked and you do not understand what the message is and what is actually happening. But with a drawing we can raise awareness, with activities such as music, theater, we manage to reach people, we manage to pass the message. So I would say in conclusion that artistic activism is new in Guinea, that's true, but I think that in the long run it will be the norm, because all the people who have followed our actions or our training say that it's the best way to campaign, it's the best way to get the message across.

**How did the authorities react to your actions, if there were any reactions from the authorities?**

They really appreciated it, even if some of them were brought in. In fact, it opened the debate in the public space. They liked it a lot because they like the theater. Theater is something in Guinea that people love. So watching the play of the artist makes them laugh and they see the whole message in it. When asking the question: What did you see here, does it work, is this how to do, what to change, they still give you some information for that. There were reactions from the town hall, they appreciated it, they said that these are things that really need to be changed, that it is good and that we must continue.

**What was your experience working with your participants?**

**Are you happy with the way you were able to work together and what they learned?**

It was a great experience for me. From the recruitment process, to the final selection, to the accommodation (because they spent a week together in the hotel), we were able to establish a group and after that I still had to coordinate their artistic activities. All these people have found ways according to their skills to do artistic activities. Those who are artists and actors were able to take action on this, journalists investigated corruption in an area such as hospitals, we organized a screening-debate day on that.

**Was there a change for you personally, a change of perspective, while the project was being carried out? What did you learn from this process of project realization and has your understanding of creative approaches to activism changed?**

I learned quite a lot. You had to find something simple, train eight people for a six-month project, supervise, carry out actions. As the project progressed, my experience increased. I keep learning through the meetings we organize, I also learn from my trainees, I also learn from other participants who are from other countries and my idea of activism has changed a lot.

Now if I ever have to take action I would like to go through art, actually. It educates, it raises awareness, it touches hearts, it puts the floor in public space. So, I say to myself, the idea I had of activism, because we have made rallies in several countries and I realize that with art people come to see what is happening, and not the speeches or someone speaking. There it is real, we see, it speaks, it communicates, it communicates without speaking. I have learned a lot and my perception of activism has changed a lot since the beginning of this process.

**What surprised you about this whole process? If you had to do something differently, what would it be?**

I was surprised at the enthusiasm that this project had in Guinea. I assure you, there are a lot of people who always ask me when it's the next activity, because what they saw, the feedback from trainees, they also want to learn from that. I did it in Conakry and a lot of people are talking about it in Guinea, that's clear. So, I was surprised by this fact, a lot of people talk about it and continue to talk to me about it.

I am asked when the new project will start and if I developed this project differently. In Guinea we have four natural regions. We need to do it in these four regions, that is to say in Lower Guinea to form an artistic activism team, in Middle Guinea the same thing, in Upper Guinea and Forested Guinea train a group of Guineans in artistic activism in different areas. And these activists can together carry out anti-corruption actions in their local settings. It does not mean that it is only at the level of the capital, but that affects the whole country in fact. I think like that, it will have an impact on the whole territory of the country. Just imagine that, because the corruption is not only in Conakry, it is in Labé, in Forested Guinea. But it cannot be done in the same way as in Conakry for example. There must be Guineans trained in artistic activism and these people can work together to lead actions to change mentality and why not get people to also carry out this type of activity.



CASE STUDY  
DESCRIPTIONS  
WESTERN BALKANS



BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

**Edisa Demić**

NORTH MACEDONIA

**Igor K. Ilievski**

ALBANIA

**Jeta Pera**

SERBIA

**Maja Kalafatić**



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## EDISA DEMIĆ

Edisa Demić has been an activist in Mostar, Bosnia & Herzegovina for over 15 years, working on a wide variety of issues, including violence prevention, youth engagement, and education. Building on her work and visibility in the city, she embraced creative activism as means to reach a wider audience, engage new collaborators, and inspire the public to challenge the pervasive corruption in her country.

In her Anti-Corruption Regional Creative Hubs projects, she relied on the leadership of students and youth to shape actions and interventions to capture the attention of the public and motivate them to challenge corruption. Her project, entitled “On My Own,” resulted in a comic strip about standing up to corruption, a public mural that has become a landmark in Mostar, an action in front of government institutions that has been adapted by activist groups in other parts of the country, and a “vaccine against corruption” fair in the city center that was covered by over 50 news outlets and websites. To accomplish this work, she fostered an environment of trust and connection among her participants, who co-defined the actions based on their strengths and passions, and who remain in close contact to plan future creative activism work.

### Can you tell us about your work and background?

I have been an activist in Mostar since 2005. I was first motivated by the struggle against violence, human trafficking, and violence against women, and I traveled all around Bosnia & Herzegovina as a manager of prevention and education activities for parents, teachers, and students. I found that the feeling of being able to help people is a beautiful feeling. I am so grateful to God to have this kind of opportunity, but I know it is also a huge responsibility.

Now, I have seventeen years of experience on this issue, and my organization called Dignity works on these activities. We are especially visible here in Herzegovina. I am also the project coordinator for an International Organization for Migration (IOM) project focused on engaging youth. These roles give me the flexibility to work on many different projects and issues.

### How did you become involved in the Anti-Corruption Regional Creative Hubs project?

This project is really something new in my life, and it came at a time when I needed a change. I saw the open call and applied, and I was very surprised when I was selected! In my experience, you really need to know someone or have someone vouch for you to be selected for anything like this, and I didn't know anyone with Open Society before.

I love the feeling of being creative, but I always thought of myself as an activist, not an "art activist." Learning about creative activism really moved and excited me. I love working on projects where you hope for the best, but don't know exactly what will happen, and from the first training in Sarajevo, I really saw this in the method. It was a very special experience for me, and I've even saved a note I got there. It reminds me of all the love, positive energy, and new friends from that experience. I keep it in my room so I will remember the beautiful story of how we all started two years ago.

### Can you tell us about your first project?

When I got back to Mostar, I started collaborating with students from the United World College. I knew those students would be particularly creative, and after speaking with some of the teachers at the school, I held some workshops to find students who were interested to help. Ultimately, I worked with about ten students, and they were a very international group, so we communicated in English.

The students came up with many creative ideas. We started a small campaign to test how to engage the public, and they made many materials (stickers, pictures, etc.) and held a public performance. They were really interested in telling a story. This was right around February and March of 2020, and this was just before COVID-19 lockdowns began. So, this was a good, small start.

### Can you tell us about your second, much larger, project?

It was a huge opportunity to work on another project for six months. I am so thankful to my kind and passionate mentor, Gjorgje Jovanovikj of the Contemporary Art Center Skopje, for helping me think through my initial ideas. I decided to find 12 participants and work with them to develop a project that would bring a lot of attention to the corruption issue in Mostar.

The result was a project called "On My Own," which was all about finding the courage to stand against corruption and bribery. COVID-19 restrictions were a huge constraint, and

we had to figure out how to do our work safely—so we decided to develop multiple ways to reach people. We made a website, a comic strip, and a large outdoor mural. We also did two public events: a masked performance and an event offering "a vaccine against corruption."

### How did you train your participants and work with them to develop "On My Own"?

I held eight weekend trainings, including one specifically on creative activism. Our group had a variety of backgrounds—for some people, this was the first time they'd been in a non-formal education setting like this. For some, it was the first time they heard about creative activism. It was such an interesting mix, and what was really special was how they all connected with each other. We started on Google Meet, and then moved into a big space for the trainings to remain distanced, but it was really obvious that these participants wanted to connect, speak together, and do more.

Our participants were 18-32 years old. They respected me and my experience, but we definitely worked as a collective to develop the project. Everyone brought their strengths and different backgrounds to the table. They thought deeply about what they have to offer and were very active in generating ideas and material for the project beyond the trainings I held. We were so connected as a group!

Eventually, we decided to do the comic strip because we had an artist with experience in creating comics, and he shared with the group about how he started and what his work meant to him, so we worked together on a story that would engage people. We also were able to bring in a well-known mural artist. Mostar has many murals, and they are an important and visible part of the city, so we thought that could be a really great way to reach the public. We worked together to develop the concept and think about ways to connect the comic and the mural. In the end, our mural became one of the most famous in the city because it is so different.

### Can you tell us more about the story in the comic strip?

We all worked together to develop the story in the comic strip – it's about how many places corruption shows up (in the hospitals, in the schools, and the legal system, and elsewhere), and how small it makes us feel. Corruption can feel like this huge, unbeatable man who holds us in the palm of his hand and can crush us, but that everyone standing together is what can shrink him down and defeat him. The comic is in the Bosnian language, but we also translated it to English to reach more audiences.

### Can you tell us more about the mural?

We wanted to use a symbol that was very recognizable in Mostar, so we chose the Old Bridge, one of the most famous bridges in Europe. The bridge is such a prominent symbol of our city, and something we all really love and respect. In the mural, the bridge is depicted as a 'fist bump' – a symbol of people power and our citizens standing up against all of the corruption and bribery that is so common in our city and has just become normal.

We used that image of the Old Bridge to connect the comic strip and the mural. At the bottom, we showed the sewage system dumping bribes into the river, and the bridge representing people uniting to stay above it. We surrounded this with positive messages about fighting corruption and put our project's QR code on the mural so people can go to

the website and find more information. Because this mural is in the tourist part of the city, we put the message in English.

Public reaction has been very positive. Many famous and visible people in the city posted stories and images of the mural, and it was featured in the press. The painter is one of the most famous mural painters in the city, and he was really helpful and engaged in the project. His girlfriend even came to help us paint!

It's not easy to represent corruption visually, but I think this really resonated with people. It's the perfect size for people to take photos with it, the colors are strong, and it's really beautiful. I've also noticed that many people are using the mural as a meeting place! One of our participants actually put the mural on Google Maps – you can just search “Anti-Corruption Mural” in Mostar, and it shows up. It's the first mural with this message, and it's made a really big impression on the city.

### Can you tell us more about the masked performance?

We did a performance in the center of the city – our group wore masks and chains and demonstrated in front of important buildings in the city. We did this because corruption is hidden in plain sight – like being behind a mask – and it's up to the public to work together to take off the mask and break the chains. We got lots of great feedback, and many people interacted with the group during the performance.

### And lastly, can you tell us more about the “vaccine against corruption” action?

Our group decided to take advantage of all of the attention around COVID and the lack of a vaccine in Bosnia & Herzegovina – so we created an anti-corruption “sajam” (fair), where we said we would be offering a “vaccine against corruption.” We held a photo shoot, and everyone who participated received a certificate. Each person shared a story about corruption they had experienced and then took a photo that included a message, our hashtag, and the project name so that they could see information about our other actions and materials. We also had music and were in the city square for over three hours.

Beforehand, we made a video and paid for a Facebook promotion, which over 30,000 people saw. It was really the right moment and the right issue – people were desperate for a COVID vaccine, many had already been going to Serbia to get one, and so many people were dying. It was the right moment to highlight the corruption and problems with our authorities.

The event became top news in the region and even across the whole country. We had so much media coverage! I think over 50 outlets (print, TV, and online) eventually covered it. Some people thought that the media was reporting that there was vaccination against COVID in Mostar, and the amount of attention was huge. We even had some media from Serbia and Croatia writing about the event. I am really proud of my group for choosing the best moment and the best issue to highlight the importance of acting against corruption. It was as if the people of Mostar decided to take a vaccine against corruption because they had no other vaccine to receive at that time.

### Did you get any reaction from the authorities or other institutions?

Yes, actually! After not having any elections for 10 years, we recently finally were able to elect a city council recently, and one of those politicians actually wanted to participate.

@ Vedran Milicic



I told him I didn't want our work to be associated with a political party, and he said he understood and was only attending as a private activist. And it turns out that he really is an artistic activist! So, to me, that was a good sign that it was having an impact on politicians.

We also had interest from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) office in Mostar. The chief of the office sent me an email asking for a meeting – he had seen the mural and read about the project, and he said the OSCE wanted to be more informed about the project and support it however they could. In particular, he wanted to introduce us to other organizations that worked on anti-corruption, and he said I should connect with the youth from different political parties to share our work – he really thinks that all these adult politicians can't do as much as the youth can.

I was also invited to speak about this project on a panel during Open Society's 30th anniversary celebrations. My group was really proud to be represented – the foundation has supported so much work against corruption over the years, and it was really nice to know that they wanted to hear our story.

### What were your goals for these actions? Do you think you achieved them?

Above all, our goal was to call people to action – to raise their awareness and ask them to be responsible, not passive, in challenging the corruption in our society. We wanted them to know that, even if we have a huge level of corruption, we can all work together to eliminate it. To do this, we wanted people to know the next steps they could take – how they

can anonymously report corruption, and how they can get engaged to raise public pressure on institutions.

With this project, we did more than I expected... really! I had a group that was connected for more than five months, and today we are friends and we have so many ideas for what to do. I think we succeeded in raising public awareness, and there are so many more conversations about anti-corruption in Mostar today after all of our actions.

After this project ends, we have things that will last: the video clip we filmed, the mural, the comic story, and all the beautiful pictures we took to document what we did in the city. And we've received attention from beyond the city too! We had calls from activists from across the country and from different ethnic communities to share about our project— I've spoken with people from Republika Srpska and from West Herzegovina about how they might try some similar activities. There was even another anti-corruption group that used masks and chains in an action, and on their social media post, they said "we're so proud of our people in Mostar!" to give us credit for the idea.

Two months after the final action, one of the most famous TV stations in the country came to Mostar and filmed a 30-minute interview with me and the participants. We went to the mural and we walked around the streets, and this helped us reach the whole general public in Bosnia & Herzegovina. Between this and the thousands of views on our video, I was very thankful that we got out the message and made people think about challenging corruption.

It was also important for me to emphasize that this challenge can come from young people. They are really active and creative – just waiting for an opportunity. This project really gave them that opportunity for different thinking in my city, and to me, this was one of the most important outcomes of this project.

### How has your perspective changed during this project? You've been a committed activist for so long – what about this was new and enlightening for you?

The most important lesson I learned is to trust the creative activism process – it really works when you believe in the people you work with and build relationships with them. I trust in the creativity and originality of my team, and they really accomplished amazing things. I could feel that they trusted me too. I listened to all of their ideas with my ears wide open, and it feels wonderful to see them recognized by the media and the people of our city. I get the sense that we are even being regarded as small heroes in our society. So, sometimes we don't need a lot of money... we just need a lot of creativity!

During this project, I felt very free. For me, creative activism was a beautiful way to send a message, and it was important to make people feel that they are not alone. If we all want a society without corruption, we can all have the courage to speak up together. Corruption is present in so many parts of our society, and we need to promote the positive stories so people see that change can happen! That was another lesson: not to emphasize the ugliness, but to share the inspiring, positive stories of change.

### Do you think your group will continue working on creative anti-corruption projects together?

Yes, absolutely. We really are like a group of friends now. It's really amazing and moving how people who didn't know each other before are now so close. Recently, the group came

up with the idea of bringing public attention to all the abandoned and destroyed buildings in Mostar. This has really been their idea – they want to collect citizens' stories about these buildings to pressure the government to make them a priority. This might include a performance and a TikTok video in front of some of the most visible destroyed buildings in the city. It's really unbelievable that all these beautiful buildings are around our city in a state of disrepair – it's connected to corruption because the government always fails to do anything about them. Every year, people are injured when stones fall in the street or when they get infested with snakes. You look around our beautiful city center and see all of these hazardous reminders of destruction, and it's hard to believe we're in Europe.

### How do you see a relationship between creative/artistic approaches to activism and making social change? Why did you want to use creative activism in this case (rather than other activist strategies, political campaigning, etc.)?

Creative activism feels fresh. People can get tired of protests – some of the ones we've had in Mostar have been really bad, to be honest. Creative actions generate more attention and are appealing to the media – people don't have to agree or like the action to be brought into the conversation. It generates a lot of really different reactions, and it is easier to be provocative. It's a wonderful way to call people to action – when you call, people want to become part of your story.



## IGOR K. ILIEVSKI

Igor Ilievski is an accomplished journalist, whose 20-year career with a leading daily newspaper in North Macedonia took him to conflict zones and inside some of the most important stories in the country, region, and globe. Through it all, he was motivated by the desire to report on the issues that most affected the lives and livelihoods of people in North Macedonia and beyond, and he hoped that this work could provoke public action for positive change. Yet, as the media landscape evolved, Igor wanted to explore emerging opportunities to convey information and prompt action beyond his print journalism work.

In his Anti-Corruption Regional Creative Hubs projects, Igor experimented with a variety of actions, issues, and methods. He aimed to lay the groundwork for a network of North Macedonian activists working on the issues that mattered most to their communities, deploying creative activism methods to address local issues with deeply contextual actions. Participants in his projects created cardboard cut-out judges to invite the public to “shake-out” corruption in the judiciary, created stories about a ‘roaming trash bag’ that pressured authorities to reopen a local landfill that had been paralyzed by political infighting, and created an outdoor schoolhouse that built pressure on authorities to confront education access inequity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Can you tell us about your work and background?

I have been a journalist for a very long time. I chose this career precisely because I wanted to make things better. I still think that sharing information and talking about issues is the first step towards change, and that's why I turned to journalism.

These last few years, I've been experimenting with new ways to make the public aware of problems. This is what led me to creative activism, and I think it actually has a lot in common with good journalism. Many of the principles and mechanisms are similar, and if done right, they should both be fun and effective. I consider journalism a form of activism, and I have always thought so.

For many years, I have been exploring different ways to engage the public. That is always the main purpose of my work: provoke a reaction and make people do something about issues that concern their livelihood, their safety, or their health. For me, this project was revolutionary in an evolutionary respect: the methodology for engaging and presenting ideas to the public, and provoke change locally, helped to push my work forward.

### How did you become involved in the Anti-Corruption Regional Creative Hubs project?

The media landscape has really changed in tremendous ways. I spent a long time with a newspaper—and I do still write for printed media sometimes, maybe out of nostalgia—but I have really been looking for ways to relay stories and information more effectively. In the electronic media, there was always television and radio, but nowadays there are Internet sites, blogs, and social media. There is a huge expansion of video production in journalism, ranging from classic documentaries down to video-clip news, mobile journalism, infographics and data visualization – really a lot of change! So, I have been trying to figure out which formats were more effective and practical for me to use and which were not. Reading the call about creative activism, I felt like it had the potential to change the scope of my work – it's not just about relaying information, but the emphasis is on promoting the action that prompts engagement with issues. I really wanted to explore that.

### Can you tell us about your first, smaller project?

The working title of my first project was “Justitia Shakes the Judge.” We created a cut-out of Justitia, the goddess of justice from ancient mythology, shaking a judge with money and jewels coming out of his toga. We have a history of scandals concerning the judiciary and the security system throughout the Balkans, and this was meant to call attention to that.

In North Macedonia, we used to have a Special Prosecutor's Office, which was formed to cope with high-level corruption. But, ironically, the Special Prosecutor also got arrested for corruption herself! There was a wiretap, there were messages, and one was released where the prosecutor investigating the case told a judge who had released the Special Prosecutor on bail “if you let [the Special Prosecutor] out of jail, I will shake you out of your panties with investigations!” That sentence really caught my ear, and that was the inspiration for “Justitia Shakes the Judge.”

We made several cut-outs and put them in front of the Special Prosecutor's Office, the Ministry of Justice, the State Commission for Combatting Corruption, and the main city square. The idea with that project was to send a silent message that needed no words, no titles, no written text anywhere. We made the cut-outs so that she's holding the judge by his

right leg, but kept the left leg free so that passers-by could shake the other leg. And that is exactly what happened. The public themselves participated in “shaking” the judge.

### Was there any reaction from the authorities about your first project?

Yes, the unfortunate truth is that, the closer you perform to the origin of the problem, the shorter the performance. That was one thing I learned. We put the cut-outs in front of those institutions, and in 30 minutes at most, the security staff took them away. It took 30 minutes because they were too lazy to go see what was on the cut-outs, and they couldn't see them from their offices. But everyone, all the passers-by, were either laughing and pointing at the cut-out or holding the other leg and shaking it. It did its job – for a short while, but it did!

We positioned ourselves 50 to 200 meters away, depending on the spot, to observe. There were three of us helping, and we all watched the action from different places. Nobody had a confrontation with the police or security. The cops themselves were laughing, but they took down the cut-outs anyway. It was all a good laugh at the end.

### Can you tell us about the second, much larger, project?

In this project, we decided to focus on two broad subject areas for anti-corruption: social justice and environmental issues. This is because people are affected first and foremost by life and health, then by livelihood – therefore we focused on the environment as a determinant of life, health, and livelihood, and then social justice as a way to confront risks to the livelihood for a huge percentage of the population.

I decided that I wanted to work with different groups in several different communities, and to test many different tactics and methods, and I took this project as an opportunity to really experiment with different forms of creative activism. In terms of the curriculum, the practice, and the method, we tried as many things as we could: online, offline, in-person, remote, travelling, all sorts of things.

From among the participants, we formed different groups to engage with different communities, and to support members of each community who were already engaged with the environmental or social justice problems they face. So, our objective was to help them reach people with goodwill and mobilize momentum to face corruption challenges together. I originally intended for participants to run multiple projects and then unite for a final action. Ultimately, we couldn't do that because of COVID restrictions, the circumstances in each community, and a few personal situations. However, it was clear that enthusiasm and engagement was building as the project progressed.

### What was your goal? Do you think this project achieved it?

It was really about learning about the effective way of reaching different people and helping them engage their own communities. However, two of the actions had some immediate political impacts.

In the first case, the group assigned to the western region of the country decided to focus on the garbage collection problem there. It was a really bizarre situation – the local landfill refused to take the garbage from several villages because of inter-party relations and rivalry. It was a really stupid corruption problem that adversely affected people's lives. We created a story about the “Roaming Trash Bag,” which was a trash bag that went all

over the country taking pictures at the welcome signs of various cities and towns, next to landmarks, by lakes... things like that. It was meant to show how people needed to search around the country for other places for their trash when their own public services failed them. Based on 'roaming gnomes,' we published stories about this 'Roaming Trash Bag' on several online media sources. It was really cute and fun – we even made some coats of arms for the villages with a spear going through the trash bag on a mountain – just fun, eye-catching visuals for the story. And, just like that, a couple days after it started circulating online, the landfill began accepting garbage again. It was a very local story and very local impact, but when the team and the local activists saw the impact of their work first-hand, they were ecstatic!

In the second case, we partnered with a women's social justice group in Skopje, and they were concerned about students who could not attend school due to the pandemic, but who also didn't have the means for joining school virtually (computers, tablets, etc.). They estimated the number of students at around 8,000 – even eight children who cannot attend school is a huge number – but 8,000 is unbelievable! So, we made a virtual classroom and put it in the square, hanging markers on top of the prop, and pulled in a big blackboard, chairs, and books. We labeled it as a classroom for the 8,000 students who lost their access to schooling. We allowed people to write messages to the Ministry of Education. In the first hour, we had 12-14 messages collected, and of course disinfected the markers to keep everyone safe. It really helped to collect messages and pressure the government to do something about all of the children they were failing.

### **While you ultimately chose not to have a national-level final action, did any of your groups work together or connect their actions?**

Yes, in fact, the group that was working the eastern regions of the country connected to some of our "Roaming Trash Bag" stories. Some of the locals we engaged with were members of a bike club, and they rode bicycles around picking up trash with signs on their trailers saying "Don't be Trash, Report a Corruption Case!" and "Don't be Trash, Keep the Environment Clean!" In one of our "Roaming Trash Bag" stories, we featured this group, saying that they picked up our trash bag because no one else would. That was a way to connect the initiative and highlight that it was really in the hands of the people to keep our environment clean, as well as pressure their institutions to act.

For this, there really wasn't a reaction from the authorities, but we saw a huge reaction from the community. A lot of people joined the cleaning, including the Boy Scouts and several local NGOs who wanted to be visible to the community... about 40, 50 people in a very small place like that. That was a really significant number people coming together to join the action and 'clean up' trash and corruption in their local area.

### **What did you learn during this project? How did your understanding of creative activism change?**

In terms of my understanding of creative activism, it only deepened. We really learned a lot about each thing we tried – different actions, different communities, different circumstances, different ways of training, etc. We did everything we planned to do, except for the final national campaign, but that decision was really a response to the fact that we wound up working with very diverse groups with different scopes and different interests.

### **If you had to do this project again, what would you do differently?**

I wouldn't change much because I feel like I accomplished what I set out to do: to get as much experience with different modes and models of training, different circumstances, and different environments as possible. Each individual action really responded to a locally relevant corruption issue, and that was really my hope. Of course, I wish we could have done the project in a time where there wasn't a lockdown. That would have changed things quite considerably.

### **How do you see a relationship between creative/artistic approaches to activism and making social change? Why did you want to use creative activism in this case (rather than other activist strategies, political campaigning, etc.)?**

I think creative activism is essential. These days, it's a pre-requisite for having any effect. There are so many whitepapers and NGOs proclaiming their positions, but at this stage, they are really limited in impact. Societies everywhere are saturated with meaningless and empty political proclamations. Everyone has heard about climate change, the danger of extremism and radicalism, etc., but after a while, they are just buzzwords. Perhaps it is not the only way, but at this particular moment, I think creative activism is by far the most efficient way to change things peacefully.

### **Have you ever considered writing about your experience with creative activism?**

I am quite strict about my role and adhering to the rules of journalism. While I do think I could be pretty objective about it, I wouldn't want to write a journalistic piece about it because I am so directly involved. In the future, maybe I will explore other, non-journalistic, modes of storytelling to share my experience.

### **Will you continue to use creative activism methods in your work?**

I see the Anti-Corruption Regional Creative Hubs as just the beginning. So far, we have really just begun to scratch the surface, and we are building networks, learning, growing, and connecting. There is tremendous potential here, and I will certainly continue using these methods. I will also continue exploring possibilities to work with each of the communities and groups who participated in this project, maintaining our small activist network.

I am still concentrated on my professional work as a journalist, that part didn't stop, but I really don't want to live with corruption scandals, security issues, and all those things. I definitely think I will continue using creative activism, and probably with most of the same people I have been working with on this project. The ideal situation might be developing a network which could carry on national campaigns about particular issues, each with several stages so that we can learn, adapt, and motivate people to act in the most effective ways possible.



## JETA PERA

Jeta Pera is an activist who works with the Roma and Egyptian communities in Albania. She helps members of these communities organize and mobilize to address the many issues they face, including access to education and employment, public services, and housing. In her Anti-Corruption Regional Creative Hubs project, Jeta highlighted instances of government corruption and inaction that contributed to poor conditions faced by the Roma and Egyptian communities. In particular, she showcased the economic and social impacts of criminalizing informal ‘recycling’ work, particularly during lockdowns related to COVID-19. For her actions, she relied on a heavy sense of irony and humor—for example, painting a neighborhood on the outskirts of Tirana to resemble luxury villas and disguising horse-drawn carts as fake high-end cars preferred by members of the government elite. These eye-catching actions generated attention and amusement, particularly during the country’s general election, and won her participants attention from a wide range of Albanian citizens on social media.

Jeta chose to hold small, successive actions so that she could flexibly recruit and train participants and build momentum over time. Ultimately, her project culminated in an installation where members of the public could view photos from the community, learn about the issues they face, and understand how they could pressure the government to tackle corruption and neglect. For this installation, she collaborated with other activist groups, laying the groundwork for future creative activism work on these issues.

### Can you tell us about your work and background?

I have been engaged as an activist with the Roma and Egyptian communities for the past seven years. Throughout this period, I have joined informal groups and organizations that focus on the issues of these communities. They advocate for the protection of their rights, help them raise their voice on issues that they face, and help them organize protests and mobilize.

I studied geography and am trained as a high school teacher. During my student years, I met Roma and Egyptian activists and became involved myself. Together, we tackle the common issues faced by both communities and advocate for solutions. I work very closely with the community, and alongside the activists, we decided to participate in this project to see if we could use creative activism to address the corruption that leads to the exclusion and deteriorating conditions of the Roma and Egyptian communities.

### What context or problem led you to this project?

For me, it started with Roma and Egyptian ‘recyclers’— those who informally collect metal and plastic from disposal containers around the city as a source of income. However, according to the law, these materials become the property of local municipalities as soon as they are in the containers, and so the recyclers are often penalized or arrested by the police. This leaves community members without their main source of income or any other alternatives to provide for their families.

Working closely with them, I’ve realized how serious they are about their work. Most do not have education or other job opportunities, and the COVID-19 pandemic has made matters worse. During lockdowns, recyclers cannot practice their informal work, and many have not been able to put bread on the table for their families.

We have tried to connect these workers with the companies that are contracted to clean and collect waste in the local municipality. However, it is well known that these companies often ask for bribes for jobs, and these communities are so poor that they cannot pay enough upfront to be hired. We experimented with placing our own receptacles in certain neighborhoods so that the municipality cannot claim that the recyclers are stealing—but the police have continued to use violence and harass the recyclers even in those circumstances.

So, we decided to engage the public. We wanted to use irony to highlight the conditions that these communities face, especially during the pandemic. Particularly, I wanted to build public pressure on the institutions responsible for tackling these social issues and push them to work harder to ameliorate the conditions that these communities face.

### What kind of actions did you plan?

We planned our first action in a peripheral area of Tirana called Visberis, where around 20 families from Roma and Egyptian minorities live in barracks under very poor conditions. Here, they struggle not only with employment, but also with housing, and this makes them one of the most vulnerable groups. Government institutions and even some NGOs have claimed that the situation there has improved, but that does not reflect the actual reality that these people face.

During the month of the Albanian general elections, we painted and masked the barracks as luxury villas to ironically face the politicians and the candidates who approach these communities in order to ask for their vote, even while neglecting them during the past years.

As another part of our action, members of the community disguised the carriages they use to travel around the city as Jaguars. This highlighted the great gap and divide between the wealth and income of the politicians and the lack of wealth and income of the Roma and Egyptian community.

### How were these initial actions received by the public and the community?

We received a lot of feedback – especially many messages and comments about how people liked them. We posted the news about our actions on one of the most famous social media networks in Albania. The post got a lot of attention, and we managed to raise this issue for many Albanians. So, with this action we managed to ring the alarm on this problem, make explicit these two parallel worlds before the general election, and continue the ongoing advocacy for the rights of these communities.

### What do you think made this action successful?

I enjoyed this action greatly because, although it was challenging, members of the community got very much engaged in planning. It was one of our aims to get them involved throughout the process, and they really did help us organize the action. It helped us maintain awareness of why we are doing this in the first place, keep in sight the problem we want to address, and determine how we want to address it. So, this is one of the actions that I liked the most because we had direct contact and collaboration with the communities.

### How did you find participants in your project and training?

#### What kind of background did they have?

At the beginning when I opened the call, I was hoping young artists and activists from the Roma and Egyptian communities would apply. I found it hard to get commitment from artists, so I focused on activists and other members of the Roma and Egyptian communities. We had a variety of backgrounds in this latter group, including students, community mediators, and people who did not have education, but who were already working with different NGOs that are active in addressing these issues. Since these members are a point of contact for us in these communities, it was also a strategic decision to get them involved and ask them to help us organize.

### What do you think your participants learned during this project?

I had heard about creative activism mentioned on a few occasions, but always as an idea, not something we used in our work. During the trainings and workshops I planned as part of this project, my participants showed a lot of interest and I tried to give concrete examples to relate to the theory I presented. I think this was reflected in how we were able to examine our previous actions, notice creative aspects we could build on, and identify what we could have done differently to engage people more effectively.

For the community, this reflective discussion helped us offer concrete examples to illustrate the theory and to communicate why we hoped creative approaches would have a longer-lasting effect. I tried to keep it simple because of everyone’s different backgrounds and because this is a new theme and topic, but I received very good feedback and very positive comments that indicated people really understood. I also learned a lot from the examples that participants cited, and it was valuable to think through the answers to the questions they raised.

**Do you think that the methods of creative activism are more interesting and appeal more to different media than traditional methods used to address social issues? For example, why do you think that an installation is better than a protest organized by activists?**

I think creative activism really makes sense, and it was interesting to look back on actions we did in the past and realize how we were already using some of these strategies. I didn't know that I was doing creative actions, but I was just thinking about how to get attention, get citizens to hear these communities' problems, and make institutions listen. Actually, during the first training for the Regional Creative Hubs in 2019, one of my examples was mentioned, and only then did I realize that I actually knew how to do creative actions. We just had never made the explicit link between the theory and practice. It was helpful to think about it systematically and think about how to build on what we already knew about engaging the public and adapting our work to the context.

Of course, traditional activists methods are good, but when you can add additional things to make the cause stronger and attract more attention and more reactions, then it is even better. We need new ways to reach people and make them change their behavior. I also think creative activism became even more important during the pandemic, since people could not protest and get together in the same way. Even very small, symbolic, and creative actions could have great impact in time when people tend to be isolated. It became about generating an impact even when it was not possible to gather a lot of people to show force in numbers.

**Will you continue to use creative activism methods in your work?**

Yes, I believe I will continue using this method because I see how much it has helped me contribute to the work of my colleagues and other activists beyond my own project. People working on other issues still need help gaining more public attention and making citizens more sensitive to the issues we need to address. I am very aware that the struggle is long, and although it might not always be related with corruption, there are creative ways to address many of the issues the Roma and Egyptian communities face in Albania.

**How do you think the project evolved? Did it develop as you were expecting, or did you have to be more flexible?**

To be honest, it was definitely a process of adapting to the conditions—and even to the participants. For example, in the first two actions, we had some participants who did not stay involved in the training. Sometimes, I think it may be more effective to concentrate on one big action at the center of a campaign. But, based on the issues, the conditions we were working under, and the group, I decided to do smaller, successive actions. That also helped fill in the absence of some activists who didn't show up or stay engaged.

In the third phase, through the exhibition that I organized – artistic photos that tried to show the reality of individual recyclers – I also tried to collaborate with organizations that work on this common concern of ours. I invited them to voice reasons why they thought the situation of the recyclers needed to be addressed and how important it is for these communities. So, as an individual, I tried to get together these different organizations together for the final activities.



**If you were given the chance to do this project over again, would you do it the same way or would you do something different?**

Usually, I think that collaborating with other organizations is good. But on the other side, I am well aware that this approach might contradict the agenda or approaches of certain organizations. So, I would like to work with organizations and individuals who share my approach and have the same goals as I do. I find myself often sharing the burden of the actions and responsibility only with a close group of other activists, but I am very comfortable with a few organizations. There are some cases, however, where I have not received a positive response or enthusiasm to collaborate.

At the end of the project, I think it was very good that we were able to work with others. It really helped to share the burden of the activity, and I felt more relaxed doing it with two or three other collaborators.

## MAJA KALAFATIĆ

Maja Kalafatić is a dance choreographer, performer, and teacher based between Serbia and Slovenia. Her practice has expanded in recent years to include activism projects, in which she deeply considers movement, connection, and empathy. For her Anti-Corruption Regional Creative Hubs projects, she aimed at engaging the public in unexpected, humorous, and interactive ways.

She began with a small project in Belgrade, provocatively called the “Shit Art Project.” In it, she aimed to call attention to the ecological impacts of poor funding for parks and sanitation, as well as the arts. With a handful of collaborators, she collected dog waste and repurposed it as an art exhibit, inviting the public to consider the paltry level of funding for the Ministry of Culture in Serbia, while in the meantime, public funds are routinely misused.

Her larger project, “Work in Progress,” was co-developed with a group of participants who considered the principles of movement and interaction, as well as the local context, in selecting an action to perform. Ultimately, they undertook small acts of service for people waiting in long queues outside of administrative buildings, acknowledging the corruption they face, and supporting them in using official channels to solve their problems. This culminated in an interactive public installation, where people could identify problems that they wanted help to solve. Maja’s network of participants and activists plan to hold further actions and illustrate the power of connection and mutual aid in solving local problems.



### Can you tell us about your work and background?

I am a dance choreographer and performer, interested in both theory and practice of movement. I finished my master's degree in Dance Dissemination and have been incorporating activism into my practice for the past few years. When I heard about the call for this project, I thought that it was exactly what I'm interested in. It came at the perfect time for me.

I am based in between countries (Serbia and Slovenia), and I have an interest in liminal territories – and I'm interested in the concepts of borders, crossing, and what is done together. Also, coming from dance, I often work through the concept of touch. That's very important in all my work.

### Can you tell us about your first small project?

Phase I was a project called "Shit Art Project," which I created to highlight one of the ecological impacts of corruption. The condition of the streets and parks are poor because of government corruption. So, I based the action on the dog shit in the parks and the city of Belgrade, and connected it to the lack of funding for the Ministry of Culture in Serbia. If arts and culture makes up only 0.73% of the state budget – that's shit, and we're going to give you back shit. I also wanted to reflect on the question 'what is an art product today?' Could the art be the shit itself?

So, with these three components, I planned an action that would invite people to clean the parks and get engaged with why they stay dirty in the first place. We built a 'shit-mobile' on a small wagon and collected the best shit from the park and displayed it as an art piece. I also interviewed people to see how much they thought arts funding would be, and most people thought it was much, much higher.

### Can you tell us about your second project?

I called my second project "Work in Progress" because I didn't want to say what the final product would be right away. I wanted to structure the project so that the participants could interact, and then interact with the public, and we would build something together.

With each training, I decided to work through dance practice. So, each training involved a theoretical part and then a practical part that might, for example, include movement concepts for people to learn. The main idea was that the project had to be interactive. I was really against presenting something from the start. The idea was that the whole workshop would stay as a document of the project, and after the workshop, we would open an interactive installation. We invited people to see what we were working on – our definitions, our tasks, photos from the workshop, and videos. There were 'tasks' for visitors so that they were invited into our world and had many things to do there.

The main idea was to deeply reflect on how we might come together to fight corruption. Inspired by our studies of touch and movement, we were really thinking about how empathy is the key to anti-corruption. If there is more empathy, there is less corruption. That is where we arrived at this idea of supporting people who face corruption in their daily lives.

Our action in public space was called "Queues in Progress." Usually, there are long lines in front of administrative places (like the post office, the police station, banks and so on), and this is where we would go to show empathy and support to those waiting. People can sometimes avoid these long queues by using bribes or connections to get things done. So, we performed small acts of support for those waiting, for example, by bringing folding

chairs, offering water to people, taking their place in line for a little while, talking to them, bringing them something from the shop, and so on. We asked people in the queue for information. What are their thoughts on corruption? Do they need to use some connections to get business done? Do they use it often? Would they ever use it? So, we began talking to people about this issue and corruption being a part of everyday life. We wanted to show empathy to people caught in the vicious circle of corruption, but also demonstrate that we supported them in getting their problems solved.

We used the video of this action in the interactive installation. Visitors there were invited to donate small problems they want to solve in their lives or neighborhoods, and now we have a box full of more than 80 problems that are going to try to begin solving. Again, we're trying to illustrate how we can all come together to solve problems rather than relying on corruption.

### What is the relationship between your project and the social/political context you're working in?

There is so much corruption in every sector of our society and our state. Addressing it is complicated and difficult because, out of despair, people need to participate if they hope to solve their problems. This is why we're talking about empathy – if we were socialized with more empathy to one another, the corruption wouldn't exist in the first place, and people could more effectively work together to solve problems.

We talked a lot in our workshops about how people would react to our actions. We spoke about people's mentality and our experience within Serbian society. We figured that people would probably react to the action – they are very open in some specific ways, but not in others. For example, many people thought we were selling the folding chairs when we first approached them. Many asked us how much they were. We were interested in understanding how they would relate to us and the idea we wanted to convey. It was important to consider the context, because to achieve the same effect, this action would have to be done completely different elsewhere (for example, in Slovenia).

### What were your goals for this project?

The emotional impact was the main goal – to interact with people, show them appreciation and respect for waiting so long in the line, rather than trying to go 'around' by using connections or bribes. We wanted people to experience support and connection while they went somewhere to solve their problems, and to show that more empathy and connection are important in public life.

We do have wider goals about making this a collective, to help people solve problems, and to challenge corruption. We've been invited by cultural groups in other cities to do a similar action with them, and this is still going to happen at the end of this year or early next. We'd like to pass the idea along.

### Do you think you achieved your goals with this project?

Actually, I think the project worked better than I thought it would. The interactive installation really surprised me – I thought it would be a pretty limited part of the project, but ultimately, it stayed up for almost two months and people kept coming and coming. It made me think that it could even be something that could exist permanently in a museum



or gallery—a space where people would be educated about creative activism and corruption, but also have space to talk about their own problem. That’s just an idea, maybe for the future!

**If you could do your project again, would you do anything differently?**

I think we could probably do with a shorter workshop. In terms of the action, the weather wasn’t great when we did it, and I think we could think through ways to better adapt to that. Our timing wasn’t great in that sense.

**How did you find participants in your project and training?**

**What kind of background did they have?**

I knew most of my participants beforehand. Some were students, some were already working, some were people I knew vaguely and just invited. They are young people from a variety of fields, including art, music, and linguistics. Everyone was already involved in activism in some way. It was a rather large group – ten people. It was a really wonderful experience getting to work together, and we’re still very close and connected. We are always sharing material on our Viber group, for example, taking pictures of queues in different places.

It was a bit difficult to manage a group of that size. Particularly, it was a challenge to manage our schedules, be sensitive to each other’s needs, and to be aware that everyone still had to study or work, so it is not always easy to take the time and be present for this type of workshop. It was a rather long program – we were all together for two weeks, and that

took a lot of negotiation and understanding to find the time that worked for all of us. In the end, we were a really great team.

**What do you think your participants learned during your workshop?**

We did a small survey at the end, and people said it was important that I gave a lot of different examples from different countries about creative activism. We did a lot of practical work in small groups—I asked them to respond to particular problems with how they might plan an action based on the different aspects of the problem and the context. I think it was important that they learned more about how to work effectively in groups and reach compromises. They also learned plenty of practical things about creating an action.

**How about you? What did you learn about the process and creative activism?**

For me, it was time management. It was a real push to use the time well, to set a challenge and a goal, and to make good use of two weeks of everyone’s lives. It was also good to do some work outside, change the space we were occupying, and find the right environment for our work. I also learned how great it could be to work in a group like this – for example, when everyone went shopping for our action, people were calling each other to say “Did you get this? How about that?” They were so excited. It was a great feeling of trust and accountability to each other, and I think this really illustrated the importance of that feeling to me.

The next challenge for me is to think about how to move beyond the connection and interactivity to getting to another level of engagement. How do we achieve a bigger impact? I am still learning about ways that might be possible.

**Were there any other parts of participating in the Anti-Corruption Regional Creative Hubs project that were important to you personally?**

While planning the larger project, I was connected through the program with a colleague from West Africa, and we really learned a lot from each other. It was such a great experience to share our insights and problems, give and get advice, and make a really deep connection. This was one of the nicest parts of the experience for me.

I really appreciated having a WhatsApp group for all of the participants, since it was great to see everyone’s actions and to get ideas. Engaging with the mentors was also important to me, as well as working in small groups for the final project meeting. That was a great opportunity to hear everyone share and reflect about their project, especially because we were all so busy with our own work.

**How do you see a relationship between creative/artistic approaches to activism and making social change? Why did you want to use creative activism in this case (rather than other activist strategies, political campaigning, etc.)?**

There is a big difference if you are from a political party or you represent a certain dogma – creative activism helps you to invite people in, engage them, and connect over an issue. We have a clear goal, but we can also use humor or approach the idea ‘from around the corner’ in a way that connects people, speaks to their context, and calls them to act. It’s coming from the people, to the people.

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*This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.*





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# OTHER RCH PROJECTS

## WEST AFRICA

Alhassane Konah Baldé (Guinea)  
Ewura Adams Karim (Ghana)  
Oumar Sall (Senegal)  
Prince Andrew Ardayfio (Ghana)  
Sally Bilali Sow (Guinea)

## WESTERN BALKANS

Ana Aćimov (Serbia)  
Anila Balla (Albania)  
Dragana Gunin (North Macedonia)  
Migen Qiraxhi (Albania)  
Vanja Lazić (Bosnia and Herzegovina)





ALHASSANE  
KONAH BALDÉ

## UN COUP DE BALAI CONTRE LA CORRUPTION

Alhassane is very active on social media, which he uses to promote behavioral change in communities. He runs a blog on WordPress called Konahlevigilant. Alongside these web-activist activities, Alhassane is the President and Founder of the NGO Citoyens pour la Paix et la Justice (Citizens for Peace and Justice), which aims to contribute to the promotion of citizens' rights and duties, the prevention and peaceful management of conflicts and social cohesion in Guinea. Alhassane is an opinion leader in his community in the Middle Guinea region. He holds a master's degree in Linguistic Science from Julius Nyerere University in Kankan, Guinea.

His project aimed to contribute to the fight against corruption in Guinea through building and training a network of artists and activists, followed by a vast community campaign against corruption. It allowed mobilized activists to revitalize their commitment against corruption, while the activities raised collective community awareness of the negative consequences of corruption.

The network of activists created will continue to increase their actions against corruption beyond the project through community actions and communication campaigns on social networks. In the longer term, that will help broaden the dimensions of the fight against corruption to a larger number of young anti-corruption activists and artists.





EWURA  
ADAMS KARIM

## STOLEN FUTURE

Ewura is a multi-talented performing artist, farmer, social entrepreneur and creative activist who has been actively involved in youth and community leadership and development, agriculture, performing arts, creative activism and entrepreneurship. He holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the University of Ghana and a Certificate in Creative Activism from the Centre for Artistic Activism. As a social entrepreneur, he is passionate about the development of youth and women in Ghana. He is the co-founder and Executive Director of Maltiti Foundation, a non-profit NGO in Ghana.

Ewura's project gathered a cabal of young Ghanaian creatives passionate about anti-corruption to further widen and deepen the conversation using their art forms. By imbuing in participants, audiences and general citizens a diehard spirit of patriotism to resist corruption in all spheres, they aimed at creating an unending conversation to boost the confidence of the people to fight corruption. The engagement of stakeholders was meant to help lead to policy implementation on the subject to ensure a decline in the corruption rate. Formal collaboration with relevant authorities would allow their platform to be used for receiving anonymous reports of corruption, which could then be forwarded to authorities to conduct an investigation and take appropriate measures. To keep the momentum of the project, the resources have been kept online for continuous access by everyone, and since the internet never dies, their works will continue to be there. They will also ensure the creation of a club of conscious youth who are passionate about the subject and are willing to be committed to it. With these in place, they can design activities and request external funding to embark on them. The project will ensure constant training and communication.





OTHER ROH PROJECTS / WEST AFRICA  
**SENEGAL.**



**OUMAR  
SALL**

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# ARTU – AARU (AVERTIS, NOUS SOMMES PLUS SEREINS)

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Oumar Sall is an author and art critic who axes his reflection on the mobility of subjects and their aesthetic influence in the spaces crossed. Between writing and filmic creation, he questions the “entrances” to reveal the whole meaning of the NOTHING in a world where inter-inactivity takes hold and covers all the senses. A pedagogical ombudsman in alternative training for vulnerable young people (Futur Academy), Oumar is also an independent speaker at the UFR CRAC (Civilization, Religion, Art and Communication) at Gaston Berger University in Saint-Louis and the Higher Institute of Management in Dakar, Senegal. Currently, he is the Deputy Director of a startup studio and creative agency in Dakar.

Through school and popular culture, his project contributes to the education of young people from rural populations to prevent the negative impact of corruption on their future and their locality. With the listeners, they identified cultural expressions that are easy for the populations to appropriate. These new works were broadcasted by community radio stations in the area, and radio hosts were among the listeners of the project. With a voluntary program (outside of school hours) conducted and implemented with primary school teachers from the village of Ndingler (Thiès region) and youth associations, young people were alerted to the issues and dangers of corruption. Since the culture in this area was very oral and “physical” (wrestling and dance), the idea was to see if the listeners could manage to “remix” popular songs and games by “contaminating” them with strong warning messages about corruption. Children (pupils and other young people) and women were the “guinea pigs” of this approach to study the appropriation. The tale was used as a creative medium. The creative side worked on two levels: “melodic diversion” of popular songs and the creation of new works. The process was the same with dance, creating new dances or rhythms that strike with anti-corruption content).



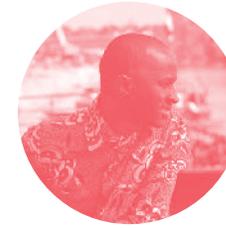
PRINCE ANDREW  
ARDAYFIO

## #MAKEWETALK- THEMATTER

Prince is an entrepreneur and creative polymath with a background in business development, digital innovation, and youth engagement. He is passionate about exploring non-conventional initiatives that challenge the status quo and the use of games for change. As a business developer, he specializes in the use of gamification and reverse-engineering of the science of fun to give startups competitive and transformational business models. He is currently the president of the Ghana chapter of Enter Africa, an afro-futuristic project that harnesses the power of gamification, game thinking, interactive storytelling and immersive experiences across 15 African countries.

The overall goal of his project was to train and nurture different sets of voices in harnessing the power of arts and creativity in artistic activism to speak on social and political issues. The hope was to create a new campus of imagination – a home for rebels, avant-gardes and activists to champion this moment of burgeoning change to an institutional culture of political and social commentary to keep the nation in check.

Another goal was to establish a partnership with the Anti-Corruption Authorities to advocate for anti-corruption policies in the country and ensure sustainability by running these workshops in high schools, youth groups and universities. They identified and trained 8 young creatives already involved one way or the other in creative problem solving and social commentary in artistic activism. Trained participants executed individual projects on their own with the skills received to give a more hands-on experience. To encourage more youth to join the fight against corruption with their voice and speak up through any medium, they dubbed the project #MAKEWETALKTHEMATTER and used social media as a tool to increase education and awareness creation targeted at different people across the country using various art forms. The whole process was documented in pictures and a docuseries from training to project execution for future reference and activism archival purposes.



SALLY  
BILALY SOW

## SANS GAZER

Sally is a young Guinean cyber-activist, blogger, and videographer with a degree in Applied Computer Management (MIAGE) from Ahmadou Dieng University in Labé, Guinea. Sally is a web developer and community manager for the Hadafo Media Group (Fm Space, Espace TV, Sweet Fm, Kalac Radio and Espace Foutah) in Guinea. He is also a blogger for RFI Mondoblog, an observer for France 24, and a reporter for TV5 Monde Speakers. Sally is a member of the Africtivist Network and the Guinea Bloggers Association (Ablogui), and is the coordinator of the Association Villageois 2.0, which aims to raise awareness on the benefits and risks of ICT.

Through his project, Sally aimed to organize the artistic struggle of young people around the country in different cities that they targeted. Usually, almost all activities were concentrated in the capital, Conakry. Citizens of these localities, especially young men and women, are constantly engaged, but the dispersion in civic engagement actions and lack of accountability benefit the rulers. The main issue was federating them through the artistic struggle to mitigate the effects of bad governance on the population. In each zone, clubs “baptized” “DISCTRART” were set up, and community interests were put forward in the project implementation. By reducing bad governance and the squandering of public funds, they would cultivate a better ground for economic activities that benefit citizens. They were able to train up to 150 young people in artistic activism, create three artistic clubs (Labé, Popodara and Pita), organize three public events (1 event per “DISCTRART” club) and produce a 12-minute documentary on the project.



ANA  
AĆIMOV

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# INNOVATIVE ARTIVISM COMBATING CORRUPTION

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Ana Aćimov lives in the Vojvodina region of Serbia, in the small town of Bečej, where she has been working as a local media journalist for many years. Ana is also part of the Bečej Youth Association that deals with the rule of law, freedom of expression and environmental issues. For years, she has been invested in this organization, which aims to develop the creative potential of the city's youth.

Given the high level of corruption and the large exodus of young people from the country, Ana decided to create an opportunity for young people to engage in a series of workshops on creative activism and methods to fight corruption at the local level. She formed a group of activists from which the "KAKO" movement (Creative Anti-Corruption Optimists) was founded. This group has exceeded its expectations, taking independent initiatives even after the end of the project. After completing the workshop series, Ana, together with a group of 50 youngsters, managed to organize three symbolic actions in different places of her city focused on environmental issues caused by corrupted affairs of the local and central government. "Cut the Corruption Net" is the title of the actions which, with symbolism and sarcasm, aim to criticize the local government that does not care about the common spaces of its inhabitants. Strengthening the connection with the surrounding community, creating youth collectives and experimenting with the transformative potentials of art and creative acts were the lessons that Ana learned during the process of implementing her project.





ANILA  
BALLA

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## THE ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE

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Anila Balla has been actively involved in the Albanian public sphere in the last decade as an artist and activist, creating art around issues of social justice, teaching socially engaged artistic practices and supporting youth education through art. Creative activism serves the proper means for marginalized voices to be heard and brings forth new, unexpected faces in the Albanian public discourse.

Her project, “The Enemy of the People”, started with a workshop on activism and socially engaged art, through which youngsters were presented with the importance of these practices, and eventually participated in realizing two public performances addressing corruption. The project developed further into a classical theatre performance organized with amateur, young actors from the local communities and presented in neighbourhoods without theatres. Anila aimed to engage youth from marginalized groups in practices from which they could learn to use their voice and address their concerns through art and activism. This engagement not only addressed social issues but presented new artistic performances for communities deprived of such practices. Through her professional skills and approach as an activist, she managed to create an atmosphere of empowerment, enthusiasm and solidarity inside the group of actors, and in the local communities where the performances were held.



DRAGANA  
GUNIN

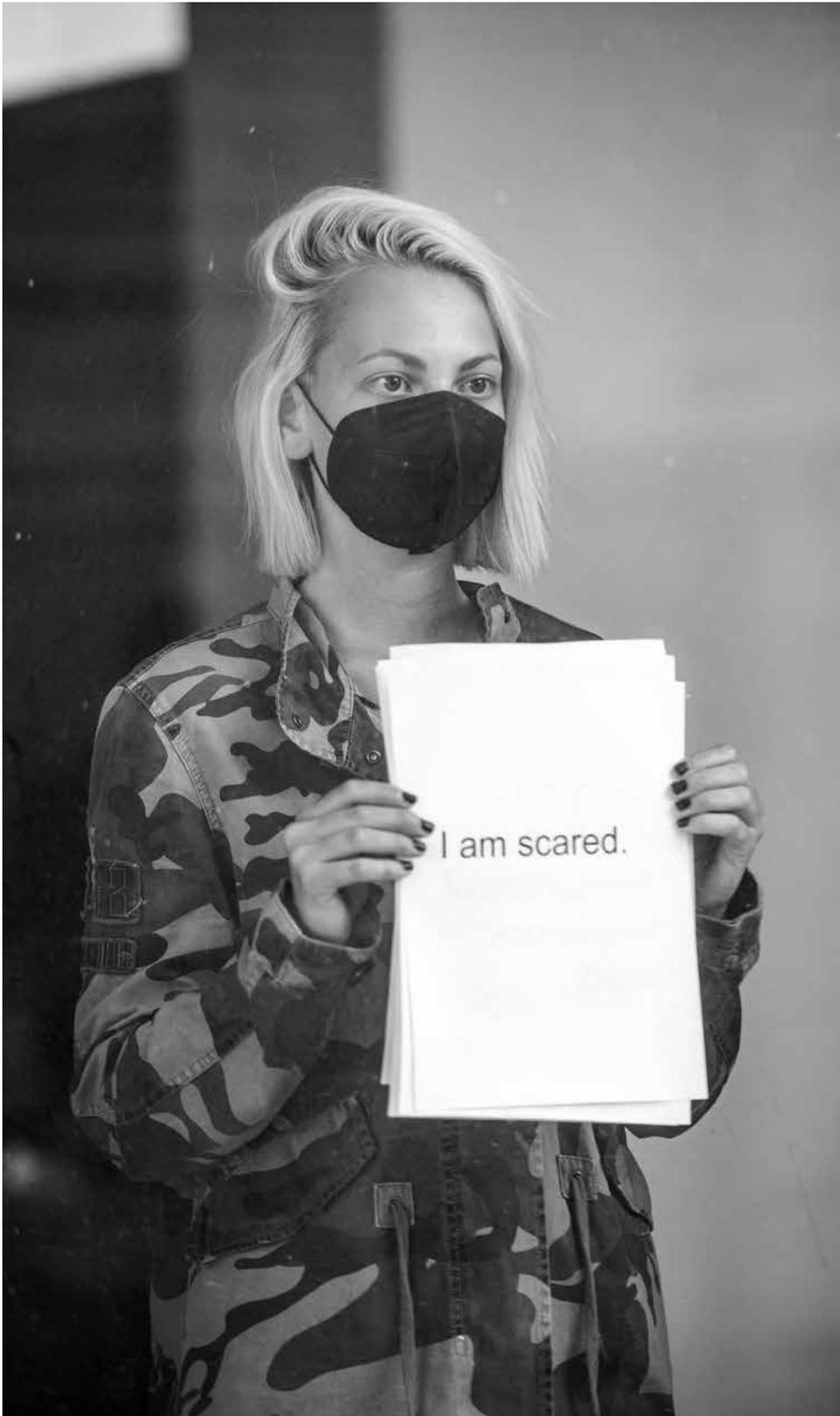
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## CORRUPTION AT WORKPLACES BASED ON GENDER

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Dragana Gunin lives in North Macedonia, between Skopje and Kumanovo, where she works as a psychologist and a theatre director. Both disciplines are constantly intertwined in her professional activity and social engagement. Sensitive to social and cultural issues, Dragana engages mainly in theatrical performances that deal with real events and the daily struggles of her country.

Although delicate and very difficult to fight, Dragana has dared through her project to surface over 500 stories of women who have experienced first-hand blackmail for sexual favours in exchange for keeping a job or achieving other professional goals. Working with full discretion to protect the identity of women, she created a group of activists with girls and actresses with whom she held a series of workshops on topics of gender-based violence and alternative methods of creative activism. In the absence of the intervention of the courts of justice, her project sets out to promote the necessity of creating solidarity collectives of women and men who support, listen to and protect each other. Her project is concretized by giving voice to these stories and publishing in audio denouncing the narrative. Based on these stories, she carried out an outdoor intervention in the city of Skopje, giving messages that bring awareness to the threatening atmosphere in which girls and women find themselves. Dragana always aims to bring an imaginative dimension to her creative works, so from this process, she is developing a dramaturgical scenario that will potentially be staged for a wider audience.





MIGEN  
QIRAXHI

## A PROMISE TO YOUR HERO



Migen Qiraxhi is an architect and activist who has been engaged for years in civil society, standing up for the right to education, against corruption and the protection of public spaces in the city. In his engagements, Migen concentrates on building a common sensibility, awareness of social issues and collective engagements.

His project, “A Promise to Your Hero”, started with a workshop on creative activism that addressed the possibility of using other skills and practices, besides activism, to maximize and sharpen common messages proclaimed in public. Evolving into a national awareness campaign, his project juxtaposed honourable historical heroes with contemporary issues. Citizens were unexpectedly put in the position to reflect and imagine how these historical figures would act and if they would decide against the present corruption. On cardboards shaped after the images of these historical heroes, citizens were invited to write what they would promise to them. Each citizen wrote a promise to their heroes and read what others had written. Discussions of these present and historical reflections followed between the organizers and the local communities where the action was held. Through this campaign, citizens were engaged to actively imagine and decide how the present would be considered from the perspective of history and the perspective of our highest commonly shared values.



VANJA  
LAZIĆ

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## FREEDOM TO THE RIVERS

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Vanja Lazić is an illustrator and graphic designer who has been very active in recent years in the protection and conservation of natural habitats in Bosnia and Herzegovina. After moving away from the city and living on the periphery, she has organized a series of public actions against the uncontrolled construction of hydropower plants and their related corruption cases that endanger the environment.

Vanja embarked on organizing actions in Livno, Derventa and Zenica to directly confront corrupted companies and authorities through her interventions that problematize what is being done to the environment. Her actions address the issue of river protection in Livno, the fight against deforestation in Derventa and the need to stop air pollution in Zenica. She developed her project around these three main pillars and called it “Freedom to the Rivers”. The initial steps of the projects involved a series of workshops focusing on the need to train and practice citizens’ creativity and alternative forms of civic reaction through arts and activism. Sound devices were used to signal the alarming level of air pollution in Zenica, cleaning actions were organized in the Sturba river in Livno and a tree-planting campaign was realized in Derventa. Her commitment to environmental issues has already turned into a life-long commitment for Vanja, through which she pushed herself out of individual creative processes and engaged her artistic skills in solidarity with social and natural concerns.





















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© RCH: „Artivism for Change“, North Macedonia, 2021

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© RCH: „Corruption at Workplaces Based on Gender“, North Macedonia, 2021

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© RCH: „Projet d'Activisme Artistique contre la Corruption (PAAC)“, Senegal

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© RCH: „Work in Progress“, Serbia, 2021

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© RCH: „ARTU, AARU (Avertis, nous sommes plus sereins)“, Senegal, 2021

14

© RCH: „Stolen Future Project“, Ghana, 2021

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© RCH: „On My Own“, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2021





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# ALL REGIONAL CREATIVE HUBS PARTICIPANTS

West Africa Participants  
Western Balkans Participants  
OSF (New York Office)  
Center for Artistic Activism (New York)  
ODS Consultants (Brussels)

**WEST AFRICA**  
**ALL ROH PARTICIPANTS**

Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA):	City (Country)	Organization
Hawa Ba	— Dakar (Senegal)	
Ibrahima Amadou Niang	— Dakar (Senegal)	
Mamadou Diallo	— Conakry (Guinea)	
<b>Mentors/Local Trainers:</b>		
Mamadou Bilial Bah	— Conakry (Guinea)	La Muse
Mohamed Lamine Soumah	— Conakry (Guinea)	La Muse
Cheikh Sene	— Dakar (Senegal)	
Ndeye Fatou Tounkara	— Dakar (Senegal)	
Mohamed Shani Abdulai	— Accra (Ghana)	
<b>Fellow:</b>		
Fatou Kiné Diouf	— Dakar (Senegal)	
<b>Participants:</b>		
Rebecca Ekpe	— Accra (Ghana)	
Hudi Al-hassan	— Accra (Ghana)	
Akosua Hanson	— Accra (Ghana)	
Adams Ewura Karim	— Accra (Ghana)	
Joanna Gunab	— Accra (Ghana)	
Jennifer Amuah	— Accra (Ghana)	
Prince Andrew Ardayfio	— Accra (Ghana)	
Magdalene Kwashie	— Accra (Ghana)	
Mamadou Aliou Diallo	— Conakry (Guinea)	
Afiwa Mata Ahouadjogbé	— Conakry (Guinea)	
Sally Bilaly Sow	— Conakry (Guinea)	
Alhassane Konah Baldé	— Conakry (Guinea)	
Mahamadou Cellou Diallo	— Conakry (Guinea)	
Ibrahima Alsény Bangoura	— Conakry (Guinea)	
Coumba Sylla	— Dakar (Senegal)	
Hamet Ba	— Dakar (Senegal)	
Djibé Diawara	— Dakar (Senegal)	
Oumar Sall	— Dakar (Senegal)	
Oumy Régina Sambou	— Dakar (Senegal)	
Mame Diarra Bousso Kane	— Dakar (Senegal)	
<b>Videographers:</b>		
Mamadou Bailo Barry		
Médoune Dia Gueye		
Yaw Obeng		

**WESTERN BALKANS**  
**ALBANIA**

	City	Organization
<b>Open Society Foundation for Albania:</b>		
Brunilda Bakshevani (Milkani)	— Tirana	
Dritan Nelaj	— Tirana	
<b>Fellow:</b>		
Diana Malaj	— Kamza	ATA Group
<b>Participants:</b>		
Migen Qiraxhi	— Tirana	NGO Civic Resistance
Anila Balla	— Tirana	Theatre director/ Independent Artist
Jeta Pera	— Tirana	Activist
Elkjana Gjipali	— Tirana	Association of Young Albanian Filmmakers
Valentina Bonizzi	— Tirana	Independent Artist
<b>Advisor:</b>		
Ema Andrea	— Tirana	Actress/Independent artist
<b>Expert (Webinar &amp; video production):</b>		
Elton Baxhaku	— Tirana	Barraka Production

**WESTERN BALKANS**  
**BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**

	City	Organization
<b>Open Society Fund — Bosnia and Herzegovina:</b>		
Aida Čengić	— Sarajevo	
Dženana Trbić	— Sarajevo	
<b>Participants:</b>		
Edisa Demić	— Mostar	
Vanja Lazić	— Olovo	
Kasja Jerlagić	— Sarajevo	
Smilja Jaković	— Sarajevo	
Lejla Mazlić	— Sarajevo	
<b>Expert (Webinar trainer on anti-corruption in environment):</b>		
Denis Žiško	— Tuzla	Center for Ecology and Energy Aarhus Center – Tuzla
<b>Advisor:</b>		
Zoran Ivančić	— Sarajevo	CPI Foundation
<b>Videographer:</b>		
Emir Džanan	— Sarajevo	

**WESTERN BALKANS**  
**NORTH MACEDONIA**

Foundation Open Society Macedonia:	City	Organization
Slavica Indjevska	— Skopje	
Adrijana Lavchiska	— Skopje	
<b>Mentors/Local Trainers:</b>		
Nikola Pisarev	— Skopje	Contemporary Arts Center
Gjorgje Jovanovikj	— Skopje	freelancer/artist
Goran Kostovski	— Skopje	freelancer/artist
Andrej Mitevski	— Skopje	freelancer/artist
<b>Participants:</b>		
Dragana Gunin	— Kumanovo	freelancer/artist
Igor K. Ilievski	— Skopje	freelancer/journalist
Zorica Zafirovska	— Skopje	freelancer/artist
Darko Taleski	— Prilep	freelancer/artist
Jelmaz Dervishi	— Skopje	
<b>Experts (Webinar trainers):</b>		
Stefan Palitov	— Skopje	
German Filkov	— Skopje	Center for Civil Communications
<b>Videographers:</b>		
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Dragan Kolevski		Cinema Futura
Elena Karanfilova		Cinema Futura

**WESTERN BALKANS**  
**SERBIA**

Open Society Foundation Serbia:	City	Organization
Radmila Maslovarić	— Belgrade	
Miodrag Milosavljević	— Belgrade	
<b>Participants:</b>		
Ana Aćimov	— Bečej	Bečej Youth Association
Maja Kalafatić	— Belgrade	
Goran Denić	— Belgrade	Museum of Corruption
Milan Stefanović	— Niš	NGO Protecta
Nebojša Djerić	— Novi Sad	European Youth Center of Vojvodina
<b>Expert (Webinar trainer on anti-corruption in environment):</b>		
Mirko Popović	— Belgrade	Renewables and Environmental Regulatory Institute (RERI)
<b>Videographers:</b>		
Nemanja Babić	— Belgrade	Panorama Films
Andrija Kovač	— Belgrade	Panorama Films
<b>Book Graphic Designer:</b>		
Mane Radmanović	— Belgrade	

**OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATION (OSF)  
(NEW YORK OFFICE)**

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Summer Peet — OSF Culture and Art, New York  
Lauren Agosta — OSF Culture and Art, New York  
Beth Dunlap — OSF Strategy Unit, New York  
Connor Smith — OSF Strategy Unit, New York  
Jessica Lowing Rosenberg — OSF Economic Justice Program, New York  
Megan Colmar — OSF Economic Justice Program, New York  
Mark de la Iglesia — OSF Economic Justice Program, New York

**CENTER FOR ARTISTIC ACTIVISM (C4AA)  
(NEW YORK)**

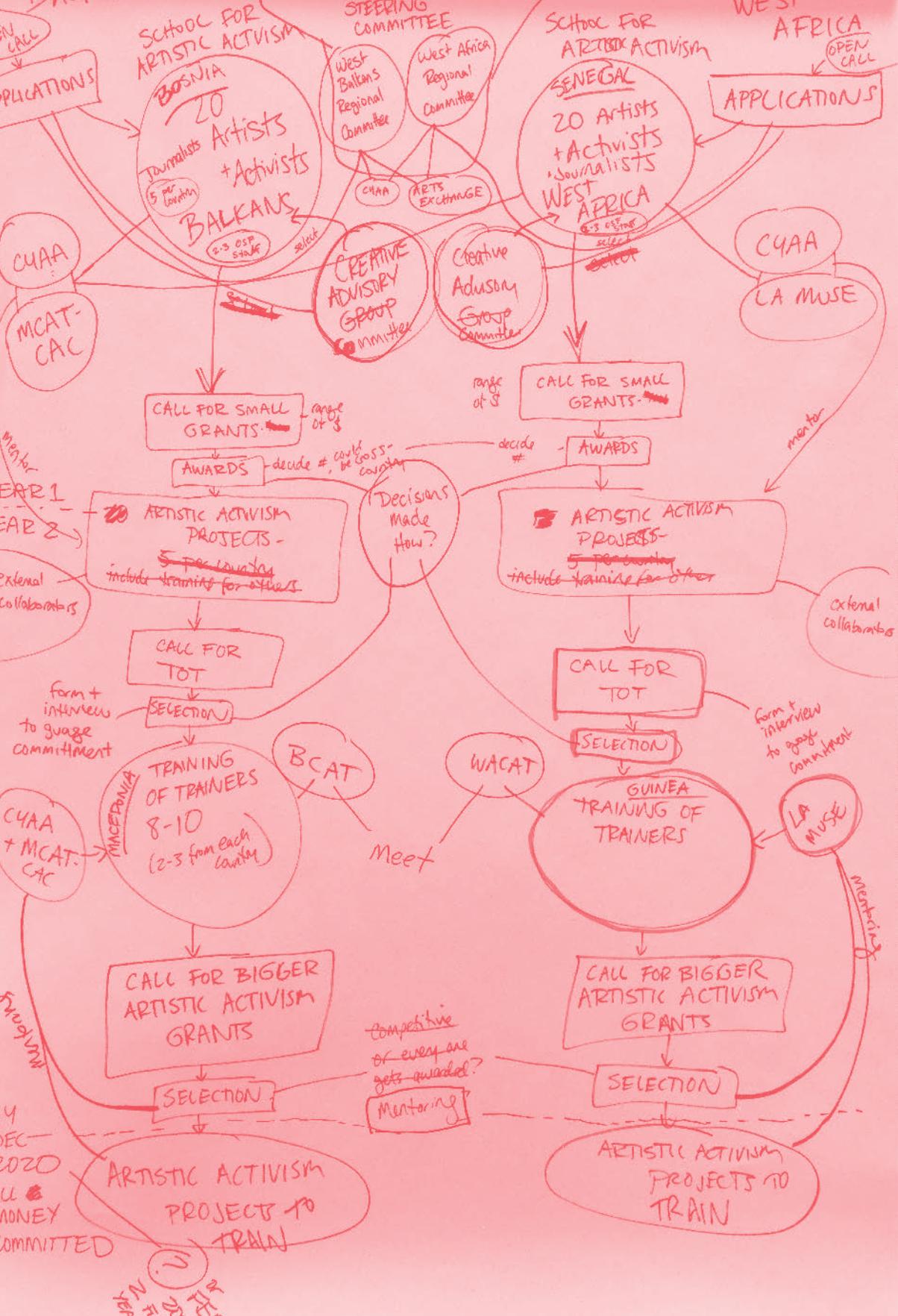
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Rebecca Bray — Co-Director, C4AA  
Stephen Duncombe — Co-Founder, C4AA  
Steve Lambert — Co-Founder and Co-Director, C4AA  
Alina Constantin — Intern  
Kaleb Stevens — Intern

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(ODS) CONSULTANTS  
(BRUSSELS, BELGIUM)**

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Anna Cesari  
Wouter de Jong  
Emma Harte  
Andrés Narros Lluch  
Hande Taner



**ROH INITIATIVE STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

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- Slavica Indjevska
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