



## ABOUT THE FORUM

The Regional Refugee Forum North East began life in 2000 as a project within the North of England Refugee Service. The first of its kind in the UK, it was initiated in response to the introduction that year of the Government policy of Dispersal of those seeking asylum in the UK. This brought totally new communities to the region, and their potential contribution to the social, cultural and economic life of the region was recognised, and support given to the unique contribution of active self-organisation by refugees themselves.

Its membership is composed of the North East region's refugee-led community organisations. Their representatives work together to produce the collective voice of the region's refugees, by identifying problems and proposing effective solutions, in order to influence policy and practice around settlement, integration, community cohesion, regeneration, inclusion and diversity. They also participate in training and learning exchange visits to develop the capacity of the member organisations and bring fresh ideas to the region. The Forum became a fully independent charitable organisation in 2004, and became a registered charity in 2005. It is managed by an Executive Committee elected by the membership, and employs two staff.

## HOW TO CONTACT US

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**REGIONAL REFUGEE FORUM**  
The Collective Voice Of The Region's Refugee Community



**AFRICAN ART & CULTURE  
IN THE NORTH EAST**





**BINI ARAIA**  
**MEDIA - COMMUNICATIONS**  
**&**  
**RCO ACTIVITY SUB-GROUP**

“I chair the Forum’s Sub-Group for Media, Communications and Refugee-led Community Organisation Activity. One aim of the Group is to raise local awareness of refugee artists and performers who wish to develop their work in the North East. We believe promoting refugee arts to the general public encourages inter-cultural understanding and integration.

Given that cultural activity and creative expression is key to the formation of identity both at an individual and community level, it is vital for refugees to engage in creative acts by participating in arts projects. Such participation arguably not only brings benefit to them as individuals and communities, but can also contribute to social inclusion.

Many refugees come from societies in which arts and cultural activity is an integral part of life. They may not define themselves as artists. Others are artists by profession. For some it’s most important to keep their cultural heritage alive within their own communities. Some examples you’ll read about here.

Refugees and asylum seekers bring with them a rich fabric of cultural expression and talent from which the rest of the society is, or could be enriched. In turn, this can also contribute to integration and social cohesion.

Also art is crucial to bring refugees out of the realm of hatred, so that they become humanised in the eyes of the general public. Art is also an effective means of informing and educating about the realities from which they have come and situations they face, thus, potentially contributing to wider social harmony.”

## AN AFRICAN WELCOME

Why the Karibu Project is bringing Africa to our doorstep.

The Forum discovers how an arts programme with a welcoming philosophy opens dialogue and encourages collaboration within the community.

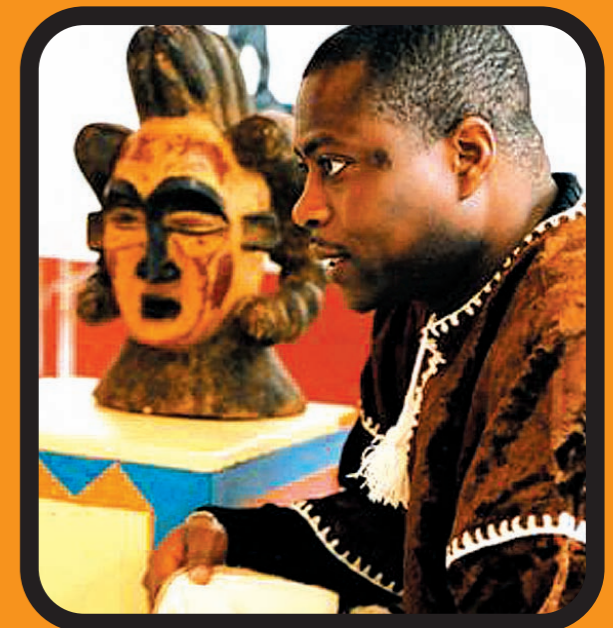
The Karibu Project was founded by African refugees now living in the North East. ‘Karibu’ means welcome in Swahili. An apt name then, for an arts programme founded on a firm belief in engaging with people of all ages, and different cultural backgrounds. The Forum caught up with Hilaire Agnama, one of the founders, to talk about the work of the project, and how it is bringing a warm African welcome to folks living in the North East.

“As Chairperson of the Middlesbrough branch of ACANE, African Community Advice North East, I work to support the integration of Africans into the North East community. Along with my friends and colleagues, Oumorou Rassidou, Alfred Mensah and Ezekiel Williams, I recognised the unique quality that art and cultural activities have in bringing people from different backgrounds together.” recalls Hilaire thoughtfully.

“At the Karibu Project we take African culture out into the local community. For example, we give workshops in fun activities like drumming, storytelling, and arts and crafts. And everyone who comes, young or old, learns something new. The impact of such activities goes beyond learning new skills though. Our workshops are places where people can share their different ideas about culture, and produce new ways of thinking about themselves and their culture, as well as Africa.

The Karibu Project is really excited by its latest work: the Living History Project. Here we’re partners with the Teesside Archives in recording and preserving memories and thoughts of Africans in the North East. This will be a historical resource for future generations of people, and will show the issues faced by Africans in their new homes in this country, and how they balance these challenges.”

The Karibu Project’s founders all have a diverse background in arts and culture: from writing, music and ceramics. For over three years Karibu has welcomed many people from the region into the African culture, promoted positive and realistic images of the continent, and helped build links right across the community.

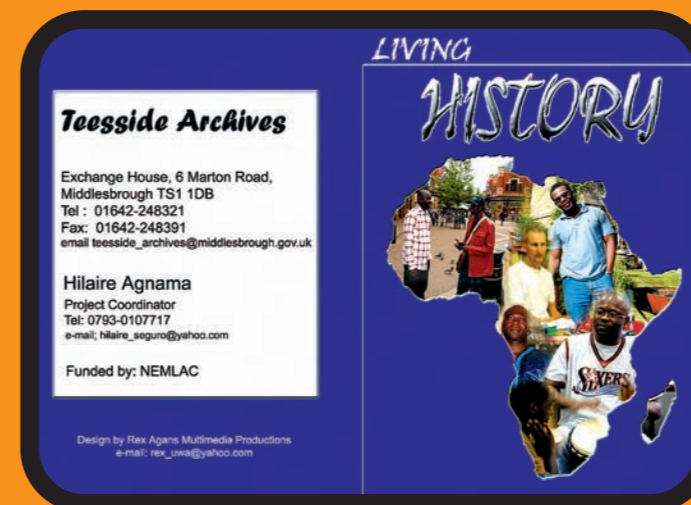


## MORE ABOUT THE KARIBU PROJECT

Do you have an idea to share? Would you like to get involved?

Contact: Hilaire Agnama - Project Co-ordinator

Tel 07930107717 E-mail [hilaire\\_seguro@yahoo.com](mailto:hilaire_seguro@yahoo.com)



“Our ideologies reflect the heritage of different societies, beliefs, traditions and cultures. Thus, as the world keeps unfolding, we are bound to face challenges while migrating from one society to another.” Hilaire Agnama, the Karibu Project.

# CULTURE AND CREATIVITY

How GAFRICOM promotes a vibrant and developing African culture

We find out how a group of Africans living in Gateshead are reaching out to the local community, and promoting new perceptions of African culture.

With the introduction of the Government's policy of dispersal in 2000, many Africans are now building lives in the North East. They are one of the newest refugee communities in the region, and, like many refugee communities, are concerned with overcoming barriers to integration within their community. Here we learn more about the work of one African community group, based in Gateshead, Tyne and Wear.

"GAFRICOM has a strong vision for the African community, believing that is crucial for Africans to participate fully in community life in the North East." says Dominic Tshaba. Dominic came to the region from DR Congo in 2000, and quickly recognised the need to be proactive in organising a way to bridge the gap in understanding about Africa, its current situation, and its people. So along with fellow Congolese Michel Mbayabo, he set up GAFRICOM, the Gateshead African Community Association.

"The Association takes on projects to enable Africans to gain the skills they need to become full members of the local community here in the region. Educating Africans on the British systems, and helping them gain skills to equip them in the job market is key to successful integration. But that alone is not enough to develop the capacity of the African community to settle fully in their new homes. They must also be enabled to contribute to the local community.

We're working to promote Africans as enriching life in the North East. Therefore outreach work with the Gateshead community is one of the most important aspects of GAFRICOM's work. We hold classes in African dancing and drumming. We teach and perform both traditional and modern music. We organise exhibitions and workshops on African art, crafts and music. We also produce cultural events that highlight the varied cultural backgrounds of people of the African nations. We run a Schools Project, which draws children into African art and culture as they play, have fun, and interact.

We've done so much valuable work with the community we're pleased and proud to have been awarded the Diversity Award 2004, and the Community Champion Award two years running."

Whatever your interests, GAFRICOM offers something to get enthusiastic about. You could get involved in mask-making, drama, drumming, storytelling, dance, masquerade, bakit, tie-die...

## MORE ABOUT GAFRICOM

Do you have an idea to share?  
Would you like to get involved?  
Find out more online at:

[www.gafricom.co.uk](http://www.gafricom.co.uk)

Email [gafricom@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:gafricom@hotmail.co.uk)

Phone 0191 422 4950



**Our activities are as varied and vibrant as our culture."**  
**Dominic Tshaba, GAFRICOM**



## HIGH SPIRITS IN GUM BOOTS

You'd normally associate gum-boots (Wellingtons) with farmers and muddy fields. But to some Africans they are essential equipment for dancing. We find who's dancing in gum-boots in the North East, and why.

The North East Southern African Society is proud to have formed a six-man Gum Boot dance group, performing at a variety of functions across the region. Here Panganai Svotwa tells us about the poignant history and significance of the gum-boot dance.

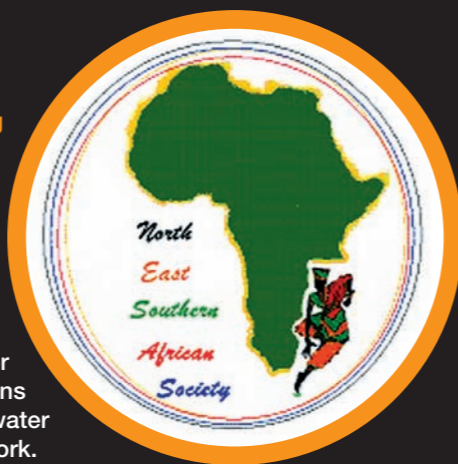
"Gumboot dancing originated in the gold mines in South Africa during the oppressive Apartheid Pass Laws." Says Panganai. "Black labourers worked in total darkness for three months at a time in appalling conditions. They were chained to their work stations and were forbidden to talk to each other. They stood up to their knees in infected water causing skin diseases and ulcers. This of course resulted in them losing time from work.

The mine bosses discovered that it was cheaper to provide the workers with gumboots than to drain the mines. The miners used the gumboots as a method of communication by slapping their boots and stamping their feet and rattling their ankle chains.

Thus the miners uniform was formed: gumboots, jeans, bare-chest and bandanas to absorb eye-stinging sweat. Helmets were a must underground. During their free time, the miners would sing and dance and drink together and remember their families a thousand miles away. The tradition of gumboot dancing was born."

## MORE ABOUT GUM BOOT DANCING

You can find out more about the North East Southern African Society on the members websites on [www.refugeevoices.org.uk](http://www.refugeevoices.org.uk). If you've any questions about gum-boot dancing, or would like to book the group to perform at your event, email: [nesas@refugeevoices.org.uk](mailto:nesas@refugeevoices.org.uk)



## AFRICAN BEATS IN NEWCASTLE STREETS

[www.lafriqueanewcastle.com](http://www.lafriqueanewcastle.com)

The groups illustrated here represent part of this region's growing vitality and diversity. The L'Afrique Festival has brought them together for the first time.

The L'Afrique a Newcastle Festival is an annual event organised by the not-for-profit company, L'Afrique en Angleterre Ltd. It aims to promote African music and culture in Tyneside and across the United Kingdom. Our Charter is to teach and present African cultural enrichment and help bring about a greater understanding and appreciation of African culture.

Throughout the year, the company brings artists from all around the world to celebrate the arts of Africa and the African Diaspora. These events also showcase the work of artists from within the North East region's African community who have developed a range of initiatives aimed at promoting awareness and understanding, integration, community cohesion and inclusion. For example, a gala dinner held to celebrate the 2005 festival, served up a feast of Afro-Caribbean food and performances from Angolans, Southern Africans and Eritreans, all of whom are members of the Regional Refugee Forum North East.

## POETRY IN MOTION

Nkosana Mpofu writes and performs poetry in Ndebele/Zulu and English. He also shares his love of the written and spoken word with the community through poetry workshops, which he has held in diverse venues stretching right across the North East. Here Nkosana explains how his poetry workshops are bringing people with a common interest together.

"I've been involved in arts, culture and education my entire working life," says Nkosana. "So I know how useful arts activities can be in explaining cultural differences, and promoting new levels of understanding. My workshops give participants a chance to learn about the complexities of African and English poetry, and explore the differences between them.

For example, dance and song are integral to African poetry. That's why my workshops all have a focus on the reading or performance of poetry too. The key is to get people engaged with poetry as an expression of a unique and colorful culture, be that African or British."

Culture is not static, as we see from the variety of established and new projects working in our community here in the North East. It is continually developing and expanding. Art and culture highlights the uniqueness of a country and its people. But further to that, by learning about other cultures, we may broaden our own

horizons, and open ourselves to new perceptions of the world.

## YOUTH ON PARADE

The three girls and two boys who make up the Cem Maneiras dance troupe are Angolans who brought with them to the UK their passion for music and traditional African dance. Established two years ago, the Newcastle-based group shares that passion with people in the North East, having performed at many cultural events in the region; for example, Refugee Week at the Civic Centre, Jazz Fest, Festival of Kites, and the Durham Carnival.

If you'd like to check out the group's performance, or invite Cem Maneiras to entertain participants at your event, email them at [cemmaneiros@hotmail.com](mailto:cemmaneiros@hotmail.com)

## MORE THAN A WORD

It's not just Africans who are moving and shaking in the region. The North East is now home to over 107 different nationalities. Refugee Week, held in June, showcased a tremendous variety of cultural events from Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, Russia and Europe.

