

ANNUAL REPORT 2021



Library Of Africa and
The African Diaspora

This report contains videos that cannot be viewed in the PDF version. To get the full experience, [please view here](#).





FOUNDER'S STATEMENT

2021 was a breakthrough year for the Library Of Africa and The African Diaspora (LOATAD). After four years of being entirely self-funded, we finally applied for and received our first-ever external funding, an Operational Support Grant, courtesy of Africa No Filter. In so doing, LOATAD became known as a “Narrative Champion” in recognition of our pioneering work to help change the narrative of Africa beyond lazy stereotypes and to provide Africans with the skills to tell their own stories.

This grant, and the five others that followed in 2021, were a show of confidence in our work and an acknowledgement of the impact

we have made in highlighting the rich and enduring legacy of African and Diaspora literature and promoting inclusion and lifelong learning by making culturally-relevant literature accessible to all.

We demonstrated our resilience and bounced back better after a turbulent 2020

We continue to work with young and older across Ghana, Africa, and the Diaspora to change perceptions of themselves, as empowered Africans, and the continent, as a place where they can have a future and be agents of change. From our work to bring more women’s stories to light through the creation of a women’s oral archive that puts orality on an



equal footing with the written word, to our outreach with children and young people through our Little LOATAD school and community libraries, changing the narrative is quite literally what we do - for the individual, for society, for Africa.

We rearticulated and reaffirmed our purpose as a proudly African, knowledge-producing institution by defining our three foundational pillars:

- **Knowledge Production**
- **Knowledge Preservation**
- **Knowledge Dissemination**

In September 2021, we received the news that we had been selected by the European Union's ACP-EU Programme AWA for funding to host a residency for writers from West Africa. LOATAD was one of 30 organisations chosen out of over 130 applications from 12 of 16 countries

in the West Africa region. We were also one of the few female-led organisations to be selected. This was further evidence of funders' belief in our work and their commitment to literature and literacy and their confidence in LOATAD to deliver sustainable results.

Inclusivity is the bedrock of our work

This was a fantastic way to end the year, and paved the way for the realisation of our long-term plan to host writers from all backgrounds and at all stages of their careers from across the continent in 2022, and beyond.

Sylvia Arthur
Founder, Library Of Africa and The African Diaspora (LOATAD)



LOATAD & THE SDGS

Our work at LOATAD contributes to the achievement of the following Sustainable Development Goals:

SDG 4 QUALITY EDUCATION

Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

See:
Library
Literacy & Workshops

SDG 5 GENDER EQUALITY

Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

See:
WomanFest
Women's Oral Archive
Exhibitions

SDG 10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES

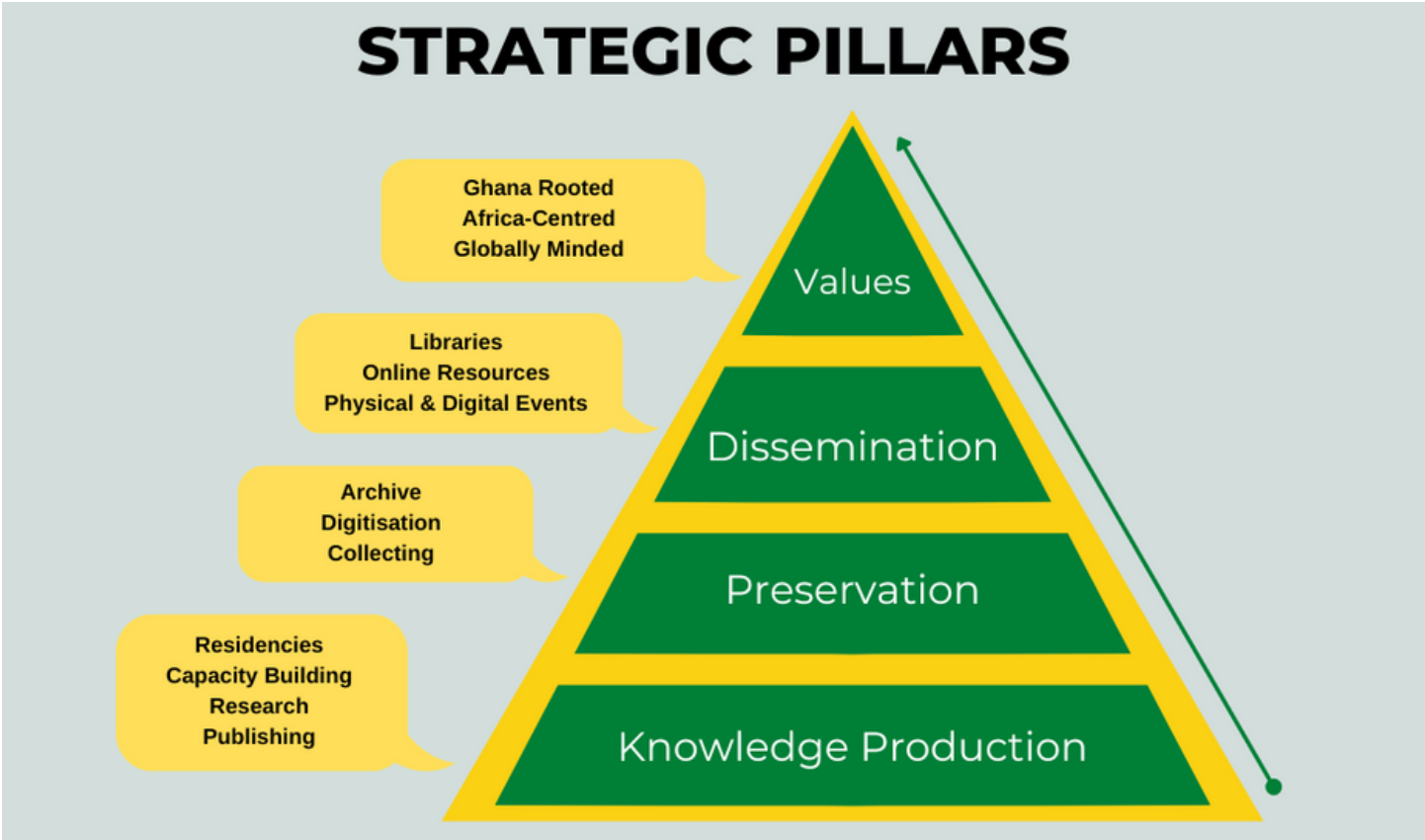
Reduce inequality within and among countries

See:
Little LOATAD school
and community
libraries



WHAT WE DO & HOW

LOATAD takes a holistic approach to achieving our aims to increase literacy, provide access to culturally-relevant books, and be producers of knowledge as well as consumers. Here's how:





KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

Pillar 1: Knowledge Production

Developing new kinds of knowledge using African and Diaspora literature as a stimulus for ideas. Our research projects add to the knowledge base of African literature:

Women's Oral Archive

The LOATAD Women's Oral Archive is made up of two components: *Women Reading Women (WRW)*, a crowdsourced audio archive of African women's written stories read by African women from across the continent; and *Women Speaking Women (WSW)*, an archive of oral stories gathered from across the coastal regions of Ghana. Funded by a Library Conversations grant from the Goethe Institut Ghana, the

Women's Oral Archive is LOATAD's response to the fact that, as a library on the continent where literacy levels are relatively low, how do we bring orality, the primary mode of storytelling in Africa, into the rarefied space of the library? Our answer was to elevate African oral traditions by going out into



communities and speaking to the people who are the keepers of our stories and folktales. Project Manager, Fauziyatu Moro (main picture, above), and photographers, Seth Avusuglo and Ernest Ankomah, travelled from the Central Region



through to the Volta Region over a two-month period, interviewing women about their lives and their stories. They spoke with 33 women in total across the four coastal regions. Their stories are available to listen to online and in the library.

Africanfuturism

This extensive piece of research into the genesis, meaning, and impact of Africanfuturism as a relatively new and influential literary genre explored the literary and cultural terrain in four countries where Africanfuturism is thriving in literature, music, visual arts, and other creative arenas. Kai Kersten, the LOATAD Africanfuturism Project Manager, examined the potential of Africanfuturist literature to effect social change on the continent. The research will continue into 2022 and the final output will be a publication available in print and for download on the LOATAD website.

Kids Curriculum

LOATAD began developing an African-centred children's literature curriculum to complement the canon that children are taught in schools. The LOATAD curriculum is expansive. It covers everything from the history of the book to the Timbuktu manuscripts, the genesis of African literature right through to postcolonial and contemporary African literature. The curriculum is designed to be as flexible as possible. It can either be taught by an adult or older children can engage with it themselves.



Outcome:

- Article Series putting this approach into action:
 - August - *A perpetual becoming: a diasporic approach to anticolonial archiving*
 - September - *Lumumba's Resource Nationalism: The relationship between resisting colonial extraction and climate change*
 - October - *From OMA (Organisation of Angolan Women) to END SARS - Radical feminisms across space and time in the African context*
 - November - *Yesterdays are Today's: Thomas Sankara and Maurice Bishop resisting neoliberalism*
- Workshop
 - Archiving anticolonialism and anti-imperialism
 - Curating the archive
 - Locating and accentuating liberatory futures in the archive



Residencies

LOATAD ran three residencies for writers from across the continent and the Diaspora in 2021:

LOATAD Digital Residency

This five-month remote residency brought together three of the most enquiring young minds, from Sudan, Nigeria, and Ghana, in a virtual think tank to postulate new African futures using indigenous knowledge as a foundation. Made up of a Writer, a Librarian, and an Archivist, our residents offer bold, informed perspectives on topical issues around African and Diaspora literature, archives, and libraries. The residency provides an opportunity for emerging professionals in these fields to benefit from LOATAD's unique resources and community, and network with professionals in related areas. We come together virtually once a month in a transnational dialogue to engage, discuss, debate,

postulate and challenge each other on our thinking and ideas.

LOATAD WomanFest Residency

Three young, female, Ghanaian creatives, two writers and a photographer, were in residence at LOATAD for WomanFest, documenting the festival in words and images. This was the first time any of the women had done a residency (click to watch video).





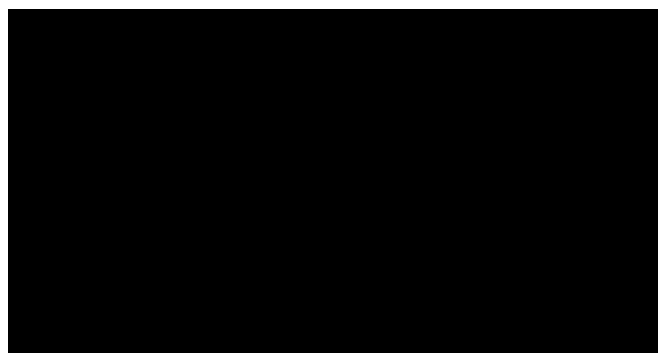
The LOATAD-SCCA Writers Residency

A partnership between LOATAD and the Savannah Center for Contemporary Art (SCCA), we hosted three emerging writers of African descent from Egypt, the United States, and the United Kingdom for a period of one month. The writers spent two weeks at LOATAD in Accra and two weeks at the SCCA in Tamale in northern Ghana working on their respective projects: a poetry collection, a play, and a narrative nonfiction text. Each writer also appeared on national radio reading from their work and presented their works-in-progress at a public event at LOATAD.

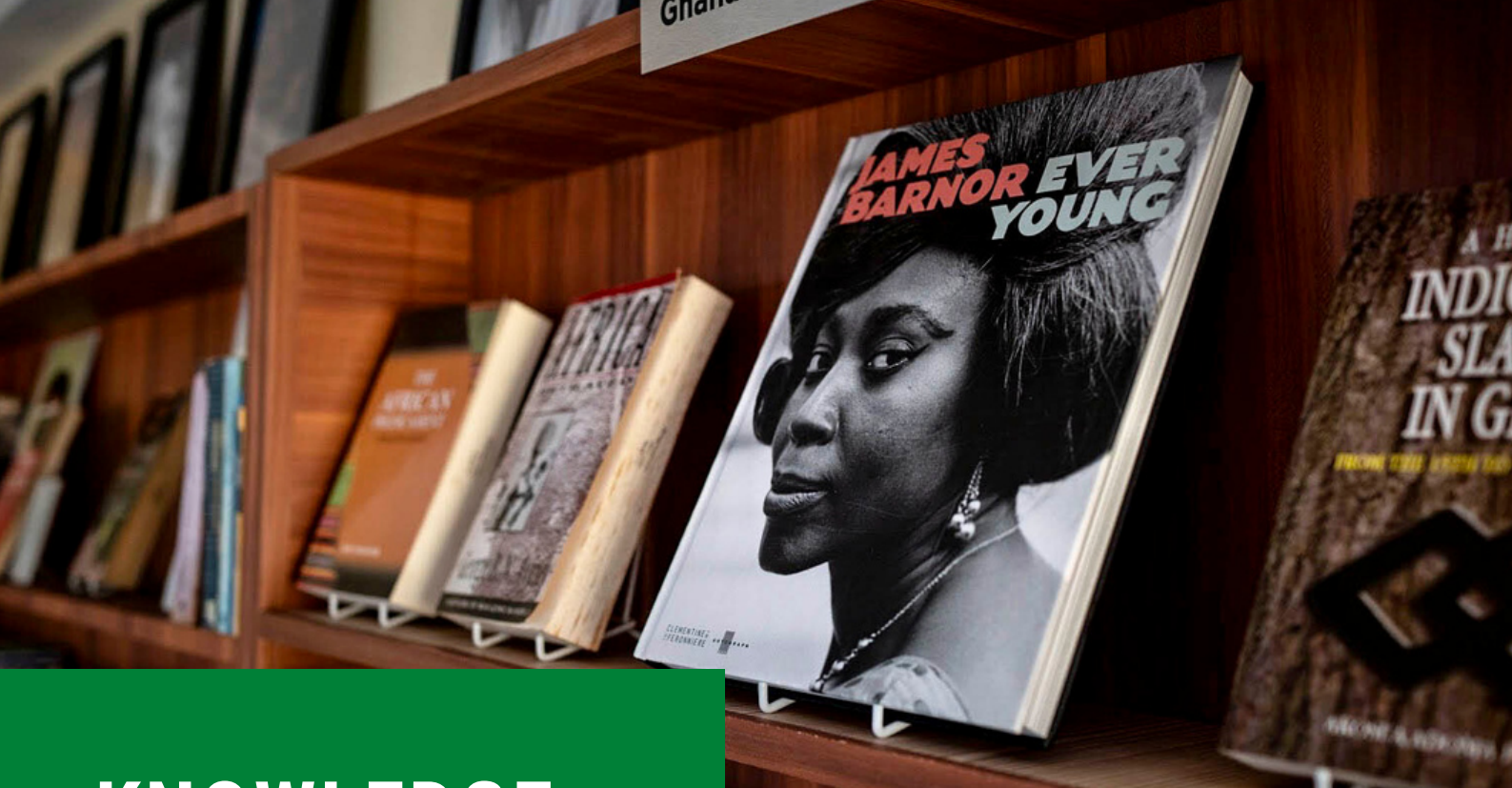
Publishing

In 2021, LOATAD published a series of chapbooks in collaboration with Light Factory Publications (LFP) in Canada. *Ghanaian Writing on Migration and Diaspora* is a set of three poetry chapbooks produced

following an open call for submissions on the theme. The poetry selected by the four writers considers the impact of forced and voluntary migration inside of Ghanaian histories and cultures. The works challenge and deepen the way migration and diaspora are represented and understood.



We received over 25 submissions from Ghanaian writers. The jury for the selection was made up of LOATAD founder, Sylvia Arthur, LFP founder, Lois Klassen, and Otoniya J. Okot Bitek, distinguished Ugandan-Canadian poet and former Poetry Ambassador for the City of Vancouver.



KNOWLEDGE PRESERVATION

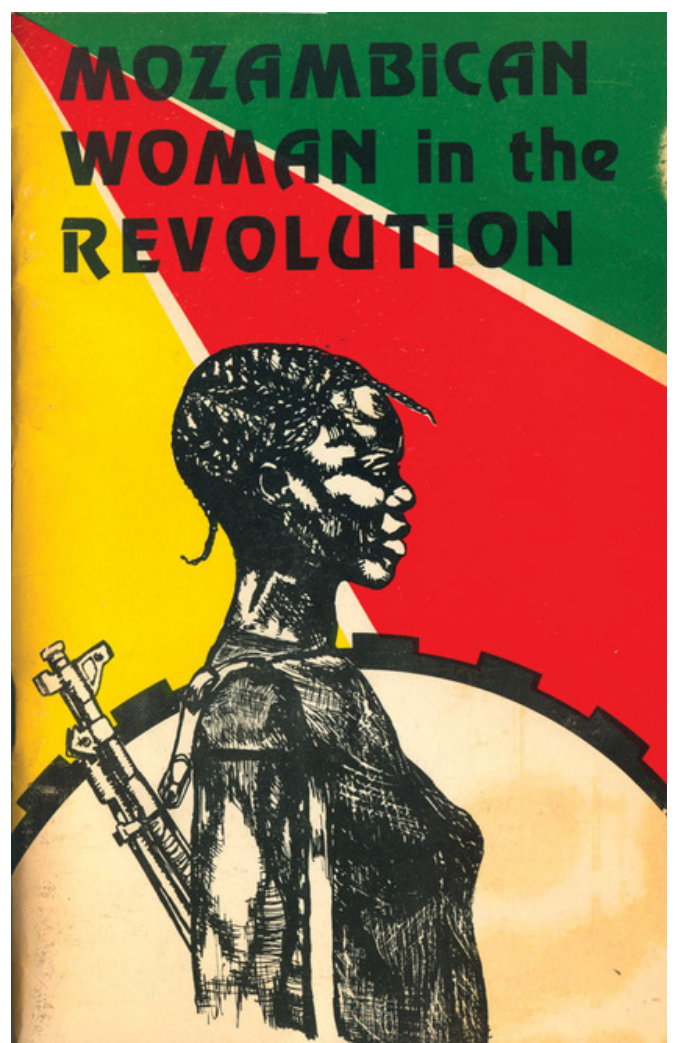
independence era, the Chinua Achebe-edited, *Okike* from the 1970s, and *Mozambican Woman in the Revolution* (below).

Pillar 2: Knowledge Preservation

Preserving the work and ephemera of African and Diaspora writers across generations through our physical and digital archives.

Expanding the Archive

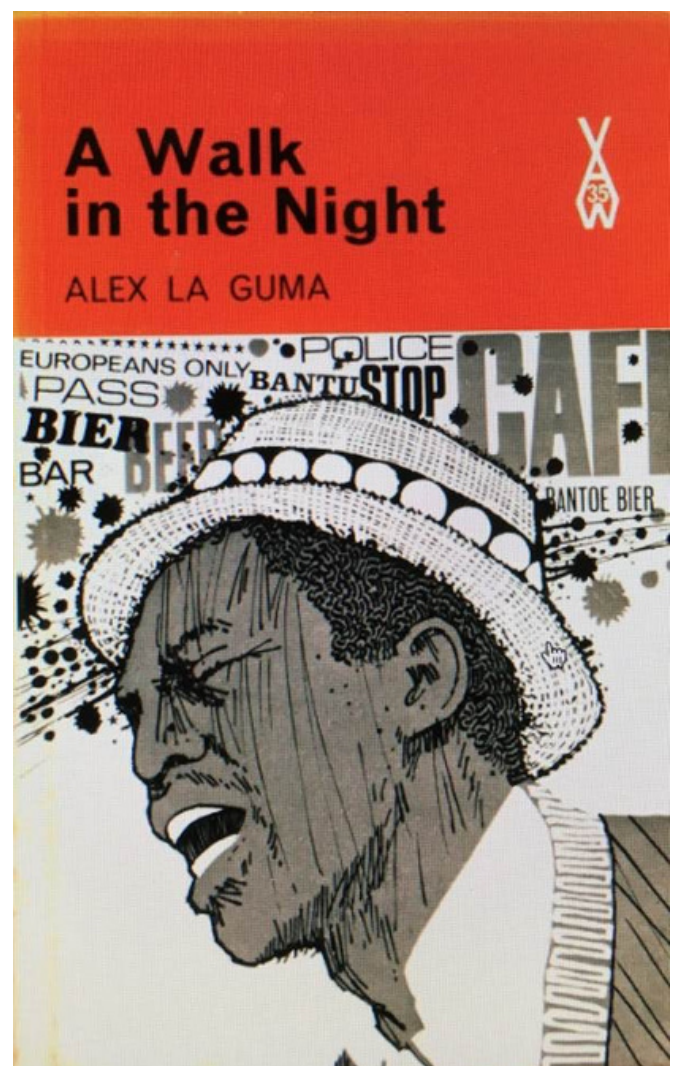
Consisting of tangible artifacts such as books, letters, and photographs, and digital artifacts such as audio, video, and other electronic files, the LOATAD archive has been growing since 2017 and is set to expand. This year, we acquired a collection of original African Writers Series books from Germany, and a small number of rare literary journals and political pamphlets, including *Okyeame*, a literary magazine founded by the Ghana Society of Writers in the post-





We've been working with a team of UK-based archivists (below) since August to develop a framework for preserving our archives. Led by Dr. Etienne Joseph, co-founder of Decolonising The Archive, with Information Management Specialist, Lydia Julien and Archivist, Kaitlene Koranteng, the aim is to employ best practices to create a system that works within an African context for an African-centred archive.

We meet with the team once a month by Zoom and are working towards achieving a set of preservation goals.





KNOWLEDGE DISSEMINATION

Pillar 3: Knowledge Dissemination

Getting books and the knowledge they contain out to the people through our expanded library, our Little LOATAD school and community libraries, outreach and community education, and events.

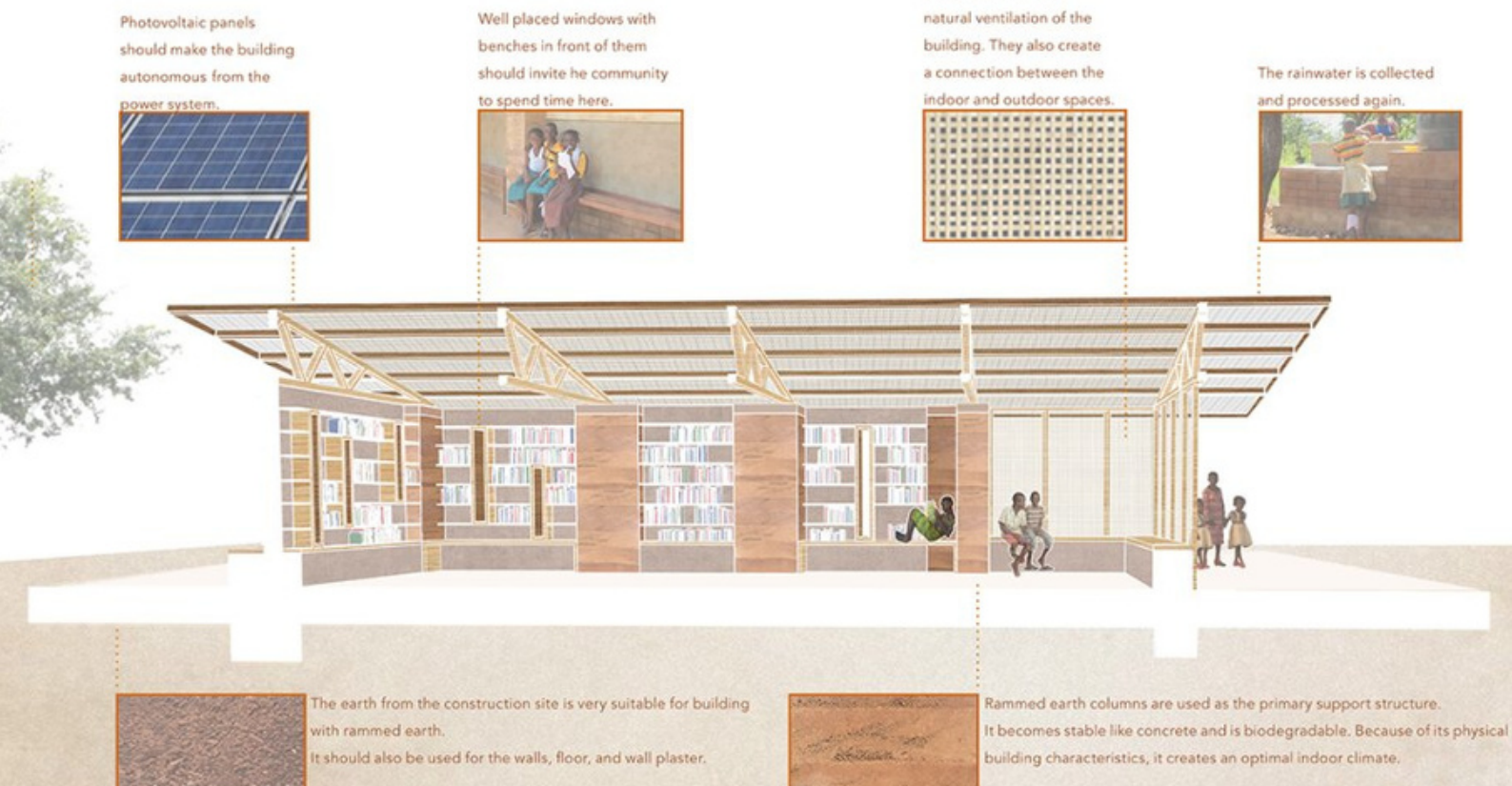
Little LOATADs

This year, we were able to pick up where we left off before the pandemic and continue our outreach activities with our two Little LOATAD school libraries at GemStar School in Ashaiman, Greater Accra, and Nipanka Secondary School in Kumawu in the Ashanti region. In our bi-monthly Saturday morning creative writing classes, we worked with 20 children aged between 8 and

15 to inspire curiosity and nurture an interest in creative writing through the expansion of the imagination. Each class involved group and individual exercises and the children were encouraged to speak up and speak out by asking questions, suggesting writing themes, and reading their finished work to the group. They were also given notebooks, writing materials, and prompts to take home so they could continue to work on their creations in their own time. By the end of the term, many of the children produced notebooks filled with stories they had written. The change in ability and confidence was evident and we held an end-of-year event at which they each presented their work (above).

Nsutam Community Eco Library

Due to the ongoing impact of the pandemic, we, along with our partners, ArchiFair, an Austrian



Austrian architectural NGO, and Hive Earth, a Ghanaian rammed earth construction company, were unable to begin construction of the new community eco library in Nsutam.

The eco library will be constructed almost entirely of sustainable building materials, primarily earth, with a view to creating a social and ecologically sustainable structure. It is a philanthropic project between our three organisations in which LOATAD will provide the books, training in library management, and organisational support to the community-led management team.



Originally slated to begin work in the summer of 2020, travel restrictions yet again meant that the team from Austria could not make the trip to Ghana. We hope to put the project into action in the summer of 2022.

WomanFest

WomanFest Ghana, a physical and online seven-day festival, explored and challenged narratives around women and girls in Ghana and Africa today.

Inspired by Equatorial Guinean writer, Trifonia Melibea Obono's controversial 2016 novel, *La Bastarda*, WomanFest recognises that stories - whether newspaper headlines or Nollywood movies, popular song lyrics or popular fiction - are the bedrock of our beliefs, and can either reinforce gender-biased cultural systems or help change them.



Featuring culturally-relevant film screenings, discussions and panels on everything from sexual and reproductive health to taboo subjects such as infertility and menstruation, readings, workshops, and open call submissions on the theme of what it means to be a woman in Ghana today, games and music and other fun, engaging activities, WomanFest was a provocative and interactive festival.

It was particularly aimed at women and girls from marginalised communities who are usually excluded from such events and conversations. It sought to show attendees how to use their agency and creativity to transform the stories we tell of African women and girls in the next decade and beyond.

WomanFest attracted over 300 visitors in person and a similar number online at virtual events

throughout the week. It was supported by a microgrant from the Harnisch Foundation through Awesome Without Borders. All videos from the event are available to view on the LOATAD YouTube channel.



Video submissions to the WomanFest theme: "What does it mean to be a woman in Ghana today?"





Music That Matters

After a stagnant run in 2020, we continued our popular live music performance event series, Music That Matters (MTM), with a limited run in 2021. We hosted the Palmwine band, Kwan Pa (above), in collaboration with the Highlife preservation organisation, An Ode to Highlife, as well as African jazz and soul artist, Susan Augustt (right).

MTM celebrates the role music plays in preserving, connecting, and promoting Ghanaian cultures, nationally and internationally.

As an African library, we have long been concerned with how best to incorporate our oral traditions into the written domain of a library. MTM recognises that the stories told through the lyrics of songs are a form of literature worthy of preservation and dissemination within the institution of the library.

We host musicians at LOATAD for an exclusive acoustic performance, and an in-depth conversation about their work, craft, and creative philosophy. MTM artists primarily make music in a Ghanaian language and storytelling is central to their lyrical output. The event serves as a showcase for diverse talents set in the intimate surroundings of the library.

MTM attracts emerging artists of world-class calibre and has quickly gained a reputation as Ghana's *Tiny Desk* after the acclaimed and influential NPR music series.





EXHIBITIONS

In 2021, we hosted our first-ever in-house exhibitions featuring three emerging Ghanaian women artists:

Billie McTernan: A Collection of a Thousand Rains

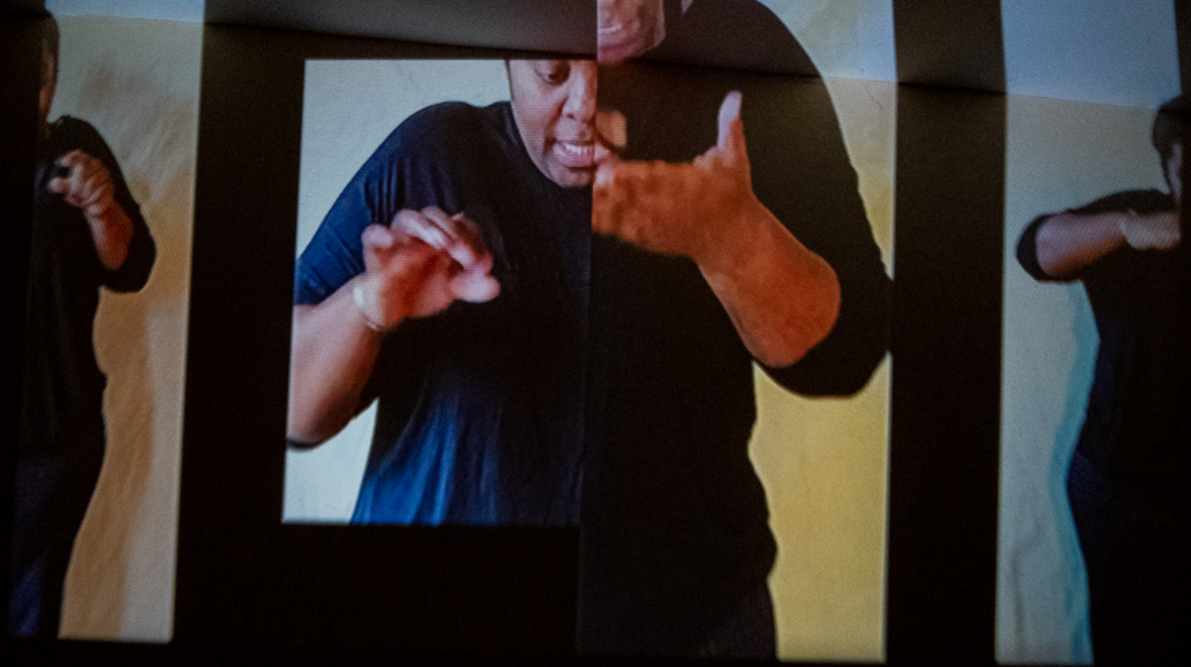
As part of her ongoing exploration of visual-language, writing systems and book-making, Billie McTernan's brought her exhibition, *A Collection of a Thousand Rains*, to LOATAD in April. In collaboration with Writers Project of Ghana, we ran a free creative writing workshop as part of the exhibition, using McTernan's work as a stimulus for participants to create new short works of fiction. The exhibition attracted over 100 visitors during its weekend showing and 15 participants for the workshop.

There was also a special guided tour and creative writing workshop for children (above).

Ami Tamakloe: W(H)OMAN: A Visual Experience



Ami Tamakloe's, *W(H)OMAN*, combines a multi-artistic experimental short film with a capsule fashion collection inspired by everyday Ghanaian woman. It asks and answers in part the layered question, "WHO is a woman?" The event included a photography exhibition featuring images of women from the Volta Region.



Kukuua Eghan: Crowns and Tiaras

This exhibition by emerging Ghanaian artist, Kukuua Eghan, was an integral part of the WomanFest weekend event. The pieces on show included portrait paintings with 3D hair installed to reflect on women being deeply rooted in their African culture despite its evolution in the context of contemporary and technological change. The portraits explored what it means to be an African woman beyond skin colour, while the abstract pieces communicated a sense of positivity and hope to women who have been victims of sexual and emotional abuse. The works in the exhibition conveyed a powerful message. According to Eghan, “They each highlight a pattern of African women striving for freedom and creating positivity out of negativity and challenges thrown at them.” Close to 300 people visited the exhibition, which attracted media attention.

Screenings

Our popular monthly film club featured award-winning independent and box office movies from Africa and the Diaspora, including *Farewell Amor*, *The Last Tree* and *Judas and The Black Messiah*. After each screening, we host a lively discussion that explores the themes and issues raised in the film. The dialogue is a chance for interaction and an exchange of ideas.

We also ran a film club for children at our Little LOATAD libraries, which also included a discussion element.





Ghanaian visual artist, Kukuua Eghan, held her first solo exhibition, *Crowns and Tiaras*, at LOATAD in August 2021 as part of WomanFest Ghana



COLLABORATIONS

We're privileged to work with organisations and individuals whose values we share to effect change:

Library Laughs with Athena Kugblenu (Feb) A night of stand-up comedy to raise money for LOATAD and our education and literacy projects across Ghana organised by British-Ghanaian comedian, Athena Kugblenu.

San Jordi in collaboration with the Catalan Association of Ghana (Apr) We hosted 35 members of the Catalan Association of Ghana and their families to celebrate San Jordi, commemorated every 23 April, when the Catalan people of Spain gift their loved ones books and roses (above).

Accra Noir book launch with Writers Project Ghana and Cassava Republic (Jul) We hosted the Ghana launch of Cassava Republic's *Accra Noir* anthology. The event featured five of the writers in the collection giving readings from their work with the book's US-based editor joining us online.

Unite Conference with Anidaso 360 (Sep) Under the theme, "Bridging the gap, building connections, and creating new narratives," 30 African Americans to LOATAD to explore their heritage and the role of the Diaspora in Africa's development.

PASCF Scholarships (Year-long) LOATAD continues to act as a facilitator for the UK-based Pan-Afrikan Society Community Forum (PASCF) to sponsor the education of two children at GemStar School, where we have a Little LOATAD school library.

LOATAD'S 2021 IN NUMBERS

Here are a few numbers that sum up LOATAD's year, from the impact of our outreach work to the number of visitors to the library and our events:

4

Number of school and
community libraries we created
and/or supported

1000

Number of children we reached
through our Little LOATADs
and other outreach activities

PRESS & MEDIA COVERAGE

LOATAD was featured on several major international news outlets including the BBC, Al Jazeera, and France 24.

LOATAD, PHYSICAL AND VIRTUAL

Number of visitors and followers, online and in-person:

2000

Number of visitors to LOATAD,
including those using the
library and attending events

11000

Combined social media
following on Instagram,
Facebook, and Twitter



DONORS

We are grateful for the support of our institutional and individual funding partners:

Africa No Filter
ACP-EU Programme West Africa
Music In Africa Foundation
prohelvetia
Harnisch Foundation
Goethe Institut Ghana

Individual Donors

We received donations from individuals from around the world through our Patreon, Ko-Fi, and other crowdfunding/social platforms.



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Front, back, and inside cover images from LOATAD's Women Speaking Women project taken by Ernest Ankomah and Seth Avusuglo in 2021.

