

Business Issue 2015

*Celebrating Women of African Heritage*

# AFROELLE

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





# Noella

## Coursaris

*On Educating Girls in Congo*

**INTERVIEW BY PATRICIA MISWA**

**I**nternational model and founder of Malaika, Noella Coursaris was born in Lubumbashi, DRC. The loss of her father at age 5, along with her mother's lack of resources, led to her being sent to Switzerland to live with relatives. After achieving a degree in business management, she moved to London and began a career in modeling, where her first campaign was for Agent Provocateur. Her success brought her to New York where she has been featured in a myriad of publications, including Vanity Fair, Essence and GQ. Alongside her active modeling career, the wife and mother of two founded Malaika, a non-profit that believes in empowering Congolese communities.

Fiercely proud of her heritage, Noella's determination to help improve the lives of Africa's youth has made her an international advocate for them. She has been featured on BloombergTV, three different CNN programs and the BBC's Focus Africa. She has addressed UNICEF and the Kinshasa Parliament and gave a TEDx talk in Paris. Noella has participated in many international panels and was invited to speak about the future of Africa alongside President Clinton at the Clinton Global Initiative's Opening and Closing Plenaries in Morocco. In 2014, Noella was named one of the 100 most influential Africans by New African magazine.

### **What was the driving force behind starting Malaika?**

Growing up in Switzerland I was fortunate to receive a good education so, when I returned to the DRC as an adult I was shocked to learn of the education crisis there. Seven million children do not attend school and there is a 46% literacy rate for women. These were the motivating factors behind creating Malaika, in order to have a positive impact on such an important issue.

### **What is Malaika's mission?**

Malaika's mission is to empower Congolese girls and their

communities through education and health initiatives. We view our role as providing the Congolese people with tools and opportunities that they can then use to bring about positive results for themselves. Our work takes three distinct paths.

The Malaika School is a free, accredited school that is providing a quality education to 231 girls. We provide classes in French, English, math, science, health and civic education which are given daily. The goal is to build the leadership capacity of each student so that she gives back to her community and has a positive, long



Educating girls lifts entire families out of poverty and creates confident, empowered young women.

-term impact on the future of the DRC.

We impact the surrounding Kalebuka village through our Community Center, built in partnership with FIFA, which provides education, health and sports programming to adults and children.

We also provide essential infrastructure development by building five wells that supply over 10,000 people with clean drinking water. This has directly reduced the number of water-related illnesses like cholera and diarrhoea.

**Why is empowering girls through education important to you?**

The education crisis in Congo disproportionately affects women and girls. If families can afford to send a few of their children to school then they choose the boys and the girls are left to do domestic work. In the village of Kalebuka, where we work, the literacy rate for girls is just 8%. Providing girls with an education helps break the cycle of poverty.

Educated women are less likely to marry early or to die in childbirth and they are less vulnerable to diseases like HIV/AIDS. They also increase their income by 25% and reinvest 90% of it into their families and communities. Educating girls lifts entire families out of poverty and creates confident, empowered young women.

## Do you have plans to expand your operations beyond Kalebuka?

Not at the moment. Malaika's work began on a small scale. The Malaika School opened with just a few classrooms and enrolled 104 students. Every year, as we raise funds, we build more rooms, enroll more girls, and expand our programs. This is a purposeful strategy as we want to make sure that our work will be sustainable.

Our focus is on providing high quality programs that have a direct impact on the community. Instead of building many schools around the world, we prefer to create the best school possible, one where we would be proud to send our children.

## What challenges did you encounter while setting up Malaika in Congo, what are your current challenges?

The biggest challenge while setting up Malaika was dealing with the bureaucracy as there can be many



delays. Current challenges include making sure we have as highly skilled staff possible. The education we provide through the school can only be as good as the staff that teach within it, so we place a high priority in training our staff. We regularly run workshops on innovative teaching methods, leadership skills, and many other topics.

## **Malaika School is a free accredited school how do you select the students enrolled?**

We have a few criteria to narrow the eligibility pool. We only enroll girls; they must be five years old as we want them to start in Kindergarten and go through their entire schooling with us; they must live no



further than 3km away from the School; and we only take one girl per family, although we have made an exception in the case of twins. The remaining eligible girls are then entered into a random lottery system where we select 30 new students.

## **How did your partnership with FIFA to build the Kalebuka Football for Hope**

## **Center come about and what role does it play in supporting Malaika's mission?**

We were chosen as the 19th host center for FIFA's 20 Centers for 2010 Football for Hope project.

The official campaign was initiated as a result of the 2010 World Cup in

South Africa and its goal was to create 20 centers across Africa to serve disadvantaged communities while promoting public health, education and football.

Together with its partner Street Football

World, who support a worldwide network of organizations that use football as an empowerment tool, FIFA has assisted us to expand our mission of creating opportunities towards social development for all youth and young adults.

The Kalebuka Football for Hope Center opened in 2013 and offers education, health, entrepreneurship and sport programs to youth and adults in the village.



## How can people get involved in empowering girls and women especially in the grassroots in Congo?

We believe that education is the catalyst for change and an educated populace leads to a robust society. So the best way to empower girls and women is to make sure they are receiving a quality education. There needs to be a cultural shift that recognizes the value of educating girls and places a premium upon it. People can reach out to local schools, including the Malaika School, and help out in any way they can, such as through donations, contributing supplies, or lending their time and expertise. Women need to have access into

every sector of society – business, culture, technology, etc.

## Where do you hope to see Malaika in the next 5 years?

We would like to steadily increase our programs – enroll more students at the school and the community center, and keep building wells and other WASH projects. We want to make sure these programs are sustainable and embraced by the community.

***To learn more about Noella and Malaika visit***

**[www.noellacoursaris.com](http://www.noellacoursaris.com)**

**[www.malaika.org](http://www.malaika.org)**