



Featured, News, Women in Society

by Tidi Benbenisti on August 16, 2017

546 Views | 1

#MAKEITHAPPEN: NÖELLA COURSARIS MUSUNKA

For Women's Month, we are profiling inspiring women who are making a difference in Africa. We're bringing you innovators, creatives, entrepreneurs and influencers whose stories of success will inspire you all through August.



Philanthropist Nöella Coursaris Musunka, founder of nonprofit Malaika, splits her time between London and New York, raising her family and raising funds for the all-girls Malaika School in her native DRC.

Having recently celebrated the Foundation's 10th anniversary, Nöella has just been appointed Ambassador for The Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the world's largest financier of programs combating these diseases through partnership between governments, civil society and the private sector.

Congratulations on your well-deserved ambassadorial role with The Global Fund. Tell us about its importance.

This is a deeply personal partnership for me. I accepted this honour in memory of six-year-old Miriam, a Grade 1 student who passed away in December 2015 due to complications from malaria, while the Malaika School was closed for the holidays. More than 400 children in the DRC die of malaria each day. It could not be more special to be on the frontline of disease prevention and, together with The Global Fund, I hope we will be able to avoid future such tragedies.

The biggest lesson Malaika has taught you?

That a 'me against the world' mentality doesn't get you nearly as far as an inclusive perspective does. It's easy to consider ourselves in solely a singular capacity, but when you start to see everything from a communal vantage point, you can impact scores of people and learn that we are part of this experience together, whether on the micro level like in a classroom at the school we built for 275 young girls in the Democratic Republic of Congo, or on the macro level like how gender inequality affects girls and women in their day-to-day lives. Malaika isn't a synonym for Nöella, it's a grassroots non-profit built from the ground up through hard work and a lot of perseverance on the part of our team, the local community and a plethora of international support. It has also taught me to be humble, to find happiness in all stages of Malaika's evolution and never take no for an answer.

A decade from now, what sort of change would you like to see in your field?

I'd like to see Africa excelling in all regards and not comparing itself to the West. We are a multi-dimensional, formidable continent with an invaluable richness in our people and their cultures, values, creativity and ambition. Socioeconomically, there is too much disparity and insecurity, with conflict in certain parts that promote instability. Technologically, we are still growing. Artificially, we have some of the best fashion designers, painters and musicians one could ever find. I want to see the strength of Africa fully realised, but that begins with trusting in the value of our agencies and how we can impact our communities and countries together. To that end, I created Malaika to empower young girls in the DRC, enabling them to prosper through our school and the general region at large through our community centre that offers literacy, sports and health programs for all adults and children.



Africa is...

The motherland. It has a unique cultural diversity and that needs to be maintained. Africa is part of the global stage, of course, but we dictate who we are to the world, not the other way around. Our pride is absolute.

What's the first thing you do when you visit the DRC?

I visit my mom first and then make my way to the school. All the while enjoying the incredible local cuisine, of course.

Motherhood means...

A special bond that words cannot describe. You can't define it – this force that is the love you have for your children. I always put them first. To see my kids healthy and attending school makes me happier than anything – and I want that for all the children in the world.

Your first job ever?

My first job was babysitting and helping children with their homework.

When you were a little girl you wanted to be...

A surgeon. The need to impact the lives of others has always been there, it seems.

What's your power outfit?

Often times a dress because it can be a quick, easy way to achieve a chic, elegant look – with a touch of lipstick!

What do you do in your free time?

I love to spend time with my kids. I also try to catch up on my reading, see my friends or go to the spa.

If you were to choose a different path, what would it be?

I'm lucky in that I do so many different things – I model, I run Malaika, I'm a mom, I travel and speak at international conferences and I get to put my feet on the ground in the DRC and work directly with the students, staff and community so my life is fulfilled. I can't imagine anything else I'd otherwise want to be doing.

What makes you laugh?

I laugh with my kids all the time. The things they come up with on a daily basis consistently surprise me in the best, most hilarious way!

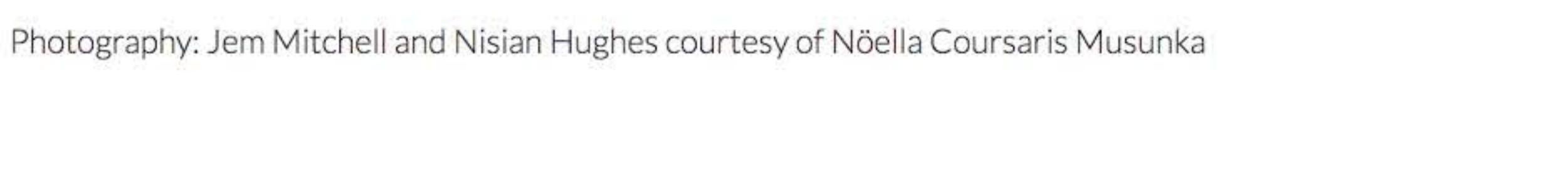
*About The Global Fund

Supported by Bill and Melinda Gates and Kofi Annan, along with other experts in the field, The Global Fund has disbursed \$30 billion to countries and communities in need. Alongside other Global Fund Ambassadors like Bono, Charize Theron and President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, Nöella hopes to be able to use this platform to not only raise awareness of Malaika's programs, but also of the tremendous need for more investments in health and education, and the intersections amongst the two.

To find out more about Nöella and Malaika, follow Nöella on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [Facebook](#), and follow Malaika on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [YouTube](#).

Photography: Jem Mitchell and Nisian Hughes courtesy of Nöella Coursaris Musunka

TAGS



Tidi Benbenisti

ELLE Assistant Editor Print

SUBSCRIBE TO OUR NEWSLETTER

Subscribe

[Terms](#)
[Contact](#)
[Subscribe To Elle SA](#)
[Advertise](#)