

Kodiak Filmmaker Returns From Workshops in Uganda

Monday, 03 June 2013

{audio}/images/stories/mp3/130604.uganda_films.mp3{/audio}

Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

While Africa may seem like a world away, many of the small towns and villages there share the same struggles and triumphs as Kodiak. That was the realization Marie Acemah had after four months in the West Nile region of Uganda. Acemah, who cofounded the nonprofit Media Action with her two sisters, recently returned to Kodiak after a life-changing winter leading peace film workshops in three different districts of Uganda.

The goal was to teach local residents how to use computers and camera equipment, so they could capture and share their vision of peace in the region. Acemah said the organization chose to host film workshops in the West Nile after visiting the area a few years ago.

-- (Uganda TOTR 1 :36 “What I saw was that it was part of Northern Uganda, which as many people know has been part of decades of civil war. But because it wasn’t in the heart of the conflict, it was ignored. The government of Uganda was ignoring it. NGO’s were virtually nonexistent there. So it was just this area that had been completely cut off from the conflict, and yet there wasn’t much attention paid to it. So it was so natural to think why don’t we go there to do this project so that these people can tell their stories and really express their vision of peace through film.”)

She said the project’s success was due in large part to the excitement of participants.

-- (Uganda TOTR 2 :11 “you know there wasn’t a feeling of being jaded by international aide organizations that often times let people down, don’t do a proper job, people were very, very open.”)

Despite only being a few years old, Media Action has already led many film workshops throughout Alaska. Typically the organization targets teenagers, but this wasn’t so in Uganda.

-- (Uganda TOTR 3 :27 “It was kind of hard to get teenagers. Because teenagers that had dropped out of school were often times really busy working in the fields, digging, getting food for the family, or maybe they’re teen moms that are home with kids. So it’s often times hard to get teenagers, because we were working with drop outs, with marginalized communities. So we were really working with 18 through 30-year-olds, people in their twenties.”)

Acemah said a big part of making the trip a success was keeping the locals’ perspectives and desires in mind. She gave an example of what she meant, and how it changed the program.

-- (Uganda TOTR 4 :26 “One of the big shockers for us, we always do documentary work. And they were like documentaries? We want

to do dramas. And we'd never really done dramatic film, it's not our field, but that's what they were passionate about. That's what they were good at. So a couple of them chose to do documentaries, but we really had to learn a lot, and they taught us because they were so natural with drama.”)

Acemah said the films touched on topics ranging from domestic violence and drug abuse to water rights and land conflicts. She said many of the issues were similar to topics covered in past film workshops held in Alaska.

You can learn more about those parallels and Media Action's work in Uganda by listening to the full interview with Acemah during KMXT's Talk of the Rock show, which airs tomorrow at 12:30 p.m.

In addition, this September Media Action will host a film festival in Kodiak to showcase some of the films created during the four months in Uganda.

###