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Children in the arts

Eric Naki
30 November 2007
Need to unite and develop youth art form internationally

Many children are deprived of opportunities to showcase their acting talents because television and cinema producers tend to use the same actors for numerous productions.

The role of child and youth theatre becomes important in filling this gap and opening a platform for children to express themselves.

This week, a group of theatre practitioners from several African countries and representatives from Sweden gathered at the Alexander Theatre in Braamfontein, Johannesburg, to share experiences about children in their countries.

The delegates came from Rwanda, Cameroon, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, Zambia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Swaziland.

They networked as various chapters under the auspices of the Sweden-based International Association of Theatre for Children (Assitej International). The body has chapters in more than 70 countries and links thousands of theatres, organisations and individuals through national centres.

The South African chapter was launched last July as part of African Children and Youth Theatre Arena (Acyta), an Assitej affiliate funded by the Swedish Agency for International Development

Acyta's Yvette Hardie said they networked and shared skills as African chapters through workshops and seminars.

"We feel that theatre as a form of art needs to be given a high priority. We feel that theatre is neglected on the African continent."

She said the organisation would lobby the AU, SADC and other regional institutions to put the issue on their agendas.

"We feel there is so much we do and which we can share, but we are not coordinated," said Hardie.

Everybody in the group had different skills which would be shared. One area was to start mentoring one another through development theatre.

"Strengthening children and young people's theatre is creating a platform for children's voices that are sometimes unheard of," said Rwandan delegate Hope Azeda.



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