

Uganda (Jamhuri ya Uganda)

Here below also a report of a trip that Duncan Dallas took to Africa in November 2008.

The Science of Laughter

Laughter

is good for your health and science proves it. Café Scientifique Uganda hosted the first Laughter Yoga session in East Africa. The only other countries in Africa to have a Laughter Yoga club are one in Zimbabwe, Egypt and South Africa,.

For Café

Scientifique - Uganda The Science of Laughter and such topics bridge science with everyday life and links audiences with the experts in a healthy debate at an informal relaxed and friendly atmosphere. That is exactly what happened at the Centenary Park, Kampala to celebrate World Laughter Day for world peace on Sunday the 3rd of May 2009.

World Laughter

Day is celebrated around the world on the first Sunday in May, when millions of people gather in public places to laugh for world peace! Laughter Yoga is the brain child of medical doctor Madan Kataria, who started the world wide movement in 1995. It is now in over 60 countries world wide

At Centenary

Park,, it was a hearty evening, well spent in beneficial and enjoyable conversation with Canadian laughter experts Fif Fernandes a Certified Laughter Yoga Teacher and Leader (CLYT/L) and Hamish Boyd (CLYL). Fif is originally from Dar-es-salaam and Hamish's mum is from Kampala. Fif and Hamish talked about the health, social, and psychological benefits of laughter illuminating the participants on scientific research. They then shifted to a laughter session, accompanied with gentle stretching, deep breathing and visualization techniques. The laughter lit participants thoroughly enjoyed laughter geeks like: greeting laughter, monkey laughter, lion laughter, grass cutting machine laughter, mobile phone laughter and peace around the world laughter.

So are there really healthy benefits in laughter? What does science say?

The research on the effects of laughter on the immune system was firmly established by leading world authorities Dr. Lee Berk and fellow researcher Dr. Stanley Tan of Loma Linda University in California. In Berk's study in 1996, the physiological response produced by belly laughter was opposite of what is seen in classical

stress, supporting the conclusion that mirthful laughter is a eustress state -- a state that produces healthy or positive emotions. Berk and other scientists continue to research the effects of laughter in all aspects of one's life.

In summary, according to Paul McGhee PhD laughter contributes to physical wellbeing:

Muscle Relaxation

- Belly laugh results in muscle relaxation. While you laugh, the muscles that do not participate in the belly laugh, relaxes. After you finish laughing those muscles involved in the laughter start to relax. So, the action takes place in two stages.

Reduction

of Stress Hormones - Laughter reduces at least four of neuroendocrine hormones associated with stress response. These are epinephrine, cortisol, dopac, and growth hormone.

Immune System

Enhancement - Clinical studies have shown that humor strengthens the immune system.

Pain Reduction

- Humor allows a person to "forget" about pains such as aches, arthritis, etc.

Cardiac

Exercise - A belly laugh is equivalent to "an internal jogging." Laughter can provide good cardiac conditioning especially for those who are unable to perform physical exercises.

Blood Pressure

- Women seem to benefit more than men in preventing hypertension.

Respiration

- Frequent belly laughter empties your lungs of more air than it takes in resulting in a cleansing effect - similar to deep breathing. Especially beneficial for patient's who are suffering from emphysema and other respiratory ailments.

Participants

at Scientifique Café

were eager to experience and learn more about the benefits of laughter.

"I came here tired and now I feel very energized...I want to laugh more and I can use Laughter Yoga techniques to enhance my business", exclaimed business consultant and trainer Steven Kyalibulha who was on his way to Dar-es-Salaam. Flavia, a boutique owner stated, "I feel very happy and light hearted. Everyone should try this!" Jane Ssanyu Ssembajwe, head gardener at Hotel Africana, was intrigued with the many proven health benefits. On the spot, she and other participants requested Fif hold a Certified Laughter Yoga Leader training.

Fif agreed.

The Laughter Yoga training on May 17th

and on one other day, will produce East Africa's first Certified Laughter Yoga Leaders. All proceeds from the training will go to benefit the Peace Camp for Ugandan Children sponsored by the Uganda Faith Writers in partnership with the Art of Peace Camp - Canada. For more information and on how to register for the Certified Laughter Yoga Leader Training contact the Scientifique Cafe at telephone 0772603880.

Scientifique

Cafes Kampala, Entebbe, Arua, Kasese, and Mbale continue to arouse interest on contemporary issues on science and technology, generating healthy debates amongst the ordinary people, school children and scientists, thus science in everyday life.

Betty
Kituyi (21 May 2009)

Report of a trip that Duncan Dallas took to Africa in November 2008. The main purpose was to select an organiser for Café Scientifique in Uganda, as part of an International Engagement Award from The Wellcome Trust. (with permission of Duncan Dallas)

Cafes in Uganda had been started by Patrice Mawa over a year ago (see here below his opinion), and, with help from Patrice, Ann Grand and the British Council we had selected a shortlist to be interviewed. The person who has got the job is Betty Kituyi, who has a science degree, has done research in science, been a teacher and is now a writer as well, so she can crossover between the arts and science. The main part of Betty's job will be to start CafeSci's in schools and co-ordinate with local universities and research establishments for speakers. When I showed her the DVD we made of a CafeSci on 'The Science of Love' (which is on YouTube) she then gave me a CD made by Tshila, a cousin of hers, and one of the songs on it is called 'Scientific Love'. This is now also on YouTube, and I recommend it to anyone (and I will use it in my next Schools CafeSci on 'the Science of Love').

There were some very interesting people I talked to on the shortlist. Geoffrey Angutoko is the first person I have heard of who has started a Science Café in a local language – not the national language. Logandan is the local language in Entebbe and Geoffrey went to the local elders saying that in the old days people would meet round a fire and discuss many issues. However now people watch TV and stay at home. So he suggested starting a Science Café and the elders agreed. With that agreement he has started one in a local bar. Here they drink a local brew called Malwa, through straws from the same pot, and discuss scientific issues. This initiative could be one way of starting Cafes in different local cultures and languages.

Ben Ayibo started the Café in Arua in the very north west of the country, an area which has seen a lot of fighting in recent years with the Lord's Resistance Army, but which now seems to be calming down a bit. The Café takes place in the Golf club, and we had a fascinating discussion on 'The Physics of Golf', discussing the dimples in the golf ball, the angle of the club face, the restitution of the handle and the angular momentum of the swing. It would make a good Café subject! Sanctus Akuma is also a teacher in Arua, teaching chemistry in a girl's school. Here, because of the fighting, many of the girls have had a very sparse and uncertain education. However they are very practical – because they have to be to survive. So Sanctus entered them into a national competition for chemistry and got them to make baking powder from eggshells and a few other simple, available, ingredients. They won the competition and now one of them is studying chemistry at university.

Duncan Dallas (20 November 2008)
Organizer of Cafes Scientifique in Leeds, UK

Cafe scientifique-Uganda started in July 2007. With support from Duncan Dallas' group in Leeds, it "walked" and is now beginning to "run".

We meet once a month (every first or last friday of the month). Members are of various backgrounds-biomedical, medical, aviation, agricultural and the general public. Membership is expanding at our base in Entebbe.

So far we have discussed such topics as: Cafe Scientifique: science goes to ugandas bars; Science communication: strategies and challenges; climate change; biofuel production and use in uganda; epidemics:the bigger picture; where does cafe sci go from here (Duncan flew all the way from UK to present this!). Our next talk is about traditional medicine on april 25, 2008 (world malaria day!). We'll incorporate a lot of malaria talk here.

We plan to expand to the rest of the country. I have already identified interesting persons west, north and north-west of the country. Local "malwa" (traditional beer) groups here are starting one in the local language.....!! Another plan is to start junior cafes in the country (Duncan is helping with this).

Over all, the potential for cafes in uganda and africa is huge, though the challenges are enormous as well.....

Patrice Akusa Mawa (7 april 2008)
Organizer
Cafe Scientifique-Uganda