

## **Creative Writing & Mental Health: East African Representations & Voices** **Kate Wallis (Department of English & Film)**

### **Context**

**Working with Kigali-based Huza Press and African creative writing teaching initiative Saseni!**, this project is concerned with supporting East Africa-based writers to write and publish creative work that engages with issues of mental health. It is a creative, critical and collaborative research initiative concerned with highlighting the relationship between literature and well-being, with modes of supporting writers who are interested in exploring difficult and traumatic subjects, and with increasing the visibility and complexity of the narratives of mental illness circulating in the East African region. This forms a key part of an emerging stream of Africa-focused programming which is an **anchor project for Exeter's UNESCO City of Literature**, focusing on building event and research connections between Devon and East Africa. It will also enter into dialogue with work being done by partner Royal African Society, highlighting current innovations shaping mental healthcare in Africa today and developing a roadmap for working towards the WHO's Mental Health Action Plan. It will also work to make links to the following UN Sustainable Development Goals: 4) QUALITY EDUCATION, 8) DECENT WORK & ECONOMIC GROWTH, 11) SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES, 16) PEACE, JUSTICE & STRONG INSTITUTIONS & 17) PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS.

### **Project Plan**

Over the next three years, working with Huza Press and Saseni!, our aim is to produce a 12-week online literature and craft workshop focused on exploring creative writing, mental health and African literary production. Out of this we would hope to produce a new anthology of creative non-fiction, fiction and poetry. This project would engage with writers from across Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and Somaliland (all DAC benefiting nations). We also hope the online workshop can develop materials and connections that might form the foundations for a future module on an East Africa-based creative writing and publishing MA programme.

### **Seed Funding**

This £2000 of seed funding would enable us to begin building the partner relationships, audiences and digital materials to support this larger project. We would initially work with Huza Press and Saseni!, to develop and run a 2-hour online creative writing workshop for up to 15 writers based in East Africa. This workshop would focus in particular on supporting the development of narratives around mental health that respond specifically to the challenges brought about by COVID19. Working with Huza Press and Saseni! to develop audiences and materials for this one-off workshop would enable the building of an evidence-base that would inform the development of this longer-term project, providing vital information about writer engagement as well as the kinds of writing and support creative writers in the region are looking for and could benefit from. The workshop itself would also have an immediate impact in terms of supporting publishers and writers in East Africa to sustain their work at this time when this global pandemic make this increasingly difficult. Finally, this would give us the opportunity to begin conversations about best practice and research around **literature and mental health in East Africa** through conversations with Royal African Society and embedding this project in the Wellcome Centre for the Cultures and Environments of Health.

### **Project Budget**

Huza Press (research into audiences, marketing and publicity for workshop, managing workshop registration)	£800
Workshop Design & Facilitation	£250
Creative Technologist / Digital Production of Workshop	£250
Creation of Digital Materials to Support Workshop (working with East Africa-based creatives and writers)	£600
Designer to Create Brand & Advertising Materials for the Workshop	£100
TOTAL	£2000

### **Reporting**

By September 2020, I would put together a short report documenting the workshop and associated partner and audience-building work that has taken place. This would focus primarily on how insights gathered from writers and creative partners through this pilot-workshop can inform the building of this larger-scale research project as part of Exeter's UNESCO City of Literature programme.