

Entrepreneur whose measure of profit is

Veye Tatak has successfully established two business enterprises in Dortmund, but she is better known for her tireless efforts to promote integration of African migrants in Germany

Not many people would freely admit to have been nicknamed after a pig when they were growing up. But then, Veye Tatak (41) is not like many people. She is a straight talking, confident and successful entrepreneur who has established two business enterprises and a not-for-profit organisation from the ground up. And the pig in question is no ordinary pig, it is Snowball.

Snowball is one of the characters in George Orwell's 1947 epic novel *Animal Farm*. He is intelligent, passionate, idealistic and endowed with oratory skills that help him win the adulation and following of other animals on the farm. These attributes are what made Tatak's four siblings give her the nickname. "Even as a child, I was very smart. I came up with all sorts of ideas, which my brothers and sisters implemented, so they started calling me Snowball," she says.

Getting paid to talk

Indeed, it is one such idea that propelled her firmly onto the entrepreneurial path. In 2003, while working at Dortmund University, one of the professors asked if she could prepare African food for a graduation party. "Some people liked the food and wondered if they could get it at an African restaurant. Realising that there was no such restaurant, I saw a business opportunity and grabbed it," she says laughingly.

She set up the Kilimanjaro catering and events service that year. The company caters to both personal and corporate parties and events. In the busy summer season she has up to seven events per month. "It is a seasonal business, so I cut operational costs by using my own pool of fifteen people that I can call when I get a contract. If the event is large, I outsource additional labour from established companies," Tatak explains her business strategy.

The entrepreneur explains that her regular source of income is her consulting firm, which she set up in 2007. "While I was employed at the Information Technology Department of the Technical University Dortmund, I was often invited to train and give talks by different organisations. I realised I could make it a full time job," Tatak narrates. She quit her university job to set up a consulting firm that offers IT services, project management and intercultural training. Like Snowball, whose rhetorical skills were unmatched on *Animal Farm*, the entrepreneur admits that her speaking engagements are the most lucrative part of her consulting work.

Growing up in Cameroon in the eighties, Tatak had a typical African middle class life, and attended a good catholic boarding school. It may not be the environment that breeds revolutionary minds, but she always knew she was

AWARDED FOR EXCELLENCE



- 2010: The Federal Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany
- 2009: Presentation of the Agenda 21 Seal of the city of Dortmund
- 2009: Winner of the SOBA Foundation Community Award of Excellence
- 2008: Prize for exhibition concept and media work of Kilimanjaro at the competition of African organisations in North Rhine-Westphalia
- 2001: Award of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) during the Academic Year Celebrations

Africa Positive - Tatak's windmill

different. "If something bothered me, I had to do something about it, or else I would have internal unrest."

When Tatak came to study in Germany in 1991, she was disturbed by the negative image of Africa in the media. In 1998, she started Africa Positive – a German language magazine that provides alternative and balanced news about her home continent.

Africa Positive is to Tatak what the windmill project was to Snowball – A difficult job, but one whose benefits far outweigh the challenges. Her close confidant, and deputy chairman of the advisory board Hans Decker says, "She's passionate about this magazine. She calls it her third child and I agree. I don't think Africa Positive would function if she was not there. She is the driving force behind it."

Today, Africa Positive publishes between 5,000 to 12,000 copies of each quarterly edition, depending on the orders. The magazine boasts of subscribers in Luxembourg, Belgium, Spain and Holland. What started out as a magazine is now a fully fledged non-profit organisation called Africa Positive e.V. which is engaged in education and integration projects in and around Dortmund.



FOTO: CHRISTINE BUKANIA

Tatak shakes her head wondrously as she explains that the magazine was her foundation for success. "I worked twenty hours a week, attended lectures, ran a magazine and raised two sons. I think those early lessons, discipline and sacrifice are what prepared me to run my business."

She is still doing it today. Her small, bustling office not far from the main train station of Dortmund is a hive of activity. She joins her team to answer phone calls and plan an upcoming event, while somehow supervising her youngest son Doh (12) who is eating lunch and doing his homework in the conference room. Her older son, Verki (16) does not hang around his mother much, but twice a week, he helps out in one of the education projects being implemented by Africa Positive e.V.

“ I do not have to balance work and family. They are just who I am. They are my life ”



A family affair: Tatak's son Verki, volunteers to teach German to African migrants

For Tatak, the line between work and family is almost nonexistent. She is happy that her partner understands and shares her work ethic and values. "If you do something that comes from the heart, you'll not feel like you are working. I involve my children in my work. That way, they learn what I do and we spend quality time together," she says.

Tatak may be a successful businesswoman, but it is obvious that her greatest source of pride is the work that Africa Positive e.V. is doing. Decker seems to have some concerns about this. "Money is not important; she just wants to do a good job. I hope that in five years, she can still do what she loves to do and earn a good living from it," he says.

Tatak is not worried. She categorically states that her measure of success is not financial achievement. "We are reaching out to people and changing minds. You cannot buy that with money."

In Orwell's novel, Snowball finds out the hard way that reform has formidable enemies when he is chased from the *Animal Farm*. For Tatak, there seem to be no worries on this score. Although she does not talk about it, she has received nothing but high accolades for her work. Hopefully, it will stay that way.

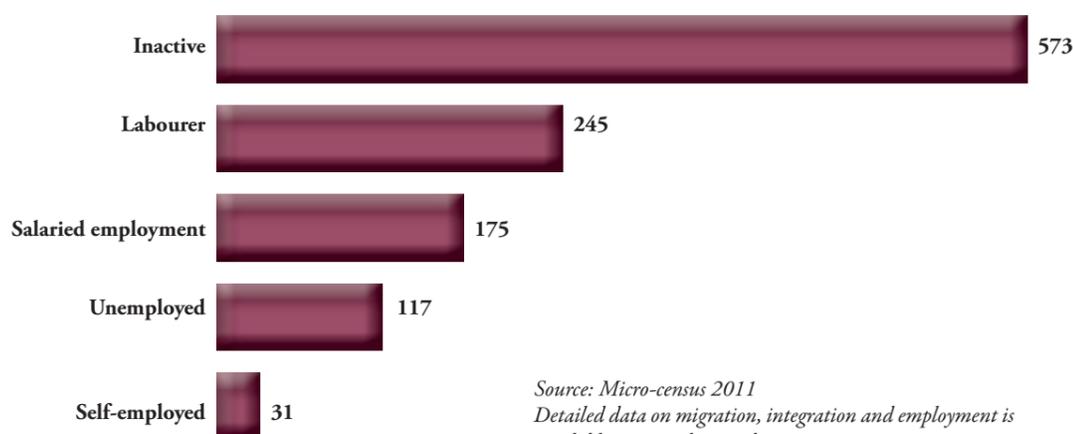
FOTO: CHRISTINE BUKANIA

not money



Touching people's lives: Tatah assuages the concerns of migrant mothers during a meeting

Participation of people of African descent in gainful employment in Germany (in 1000s)



Source: Micro-census 2011
Detailed data on migration, integration and employment is available at www.destatis.de

■ According to the 2011 micro-census, a total of 16 million people, making up 19.5% immigrated to the Federal Republic after 1949, are foreigners born on German soil, naturalised citizens, or have at least one immigrant parent. The data in this graph is limited to people who have definitely been identified as having African roots.

■ 25 to 65 year olds with a migration background are twice as likely to be jobless as compared to those without a migration background. Figures show that they tend to be employed in lower paying jobs, such as casual labour. Their numbers in the civil service are negligible. Their poor employment chances are directly related to their low education achievement.

■ To improve the situation, the Federal Agency for Migration and Refugees is spearheading programs to increase access to language, orientation and education programs. Local governments are also working with civil society organisations and local communities to improve interaction and relations between people with and without a migration background.

It matters: partnership to promote integration of Africans in Dortmund

One in every five people living in Germany today has a migration background. Yet for many, integration is still hampered by the inability to communicate, attain a good education and get job opportunities.

In 2005, after years of inaction, the German government finally passed new immigration laws which aimed to proactively address issues of integration and migration. One of the most important developments was the recognition that education attainment increases chances for finding an apprenticeship, attending professional training and improving job prospects.

Civil society organisations continue to play an important role, by providing language and orientation training, civic education and individual counselling.

In Dortmund, Africa Positive e.V. is working in partnership with the local government to promote the integration of African migrants.

Established in 1998 by Veye Tatah, the organisation receives volunteers who are seconded by the state, as well as subsidies on some running costs like office space. In addition, their education activities are carried out in state-run public education facilities.

In this way, Africa Positive e.V. is supported to address the specific needs of their predominantly African migrant clientele and make a positive contribution to integration efforts of the state.



The organisation currently implements the following programs:

- Africa Positive Magazine is published 4 times a year to inform and educate people about Africa.
- The Afro-Lern- und Integrationsmobil (AfroLim) project links African migrants with volunteers who help children to do their homework and improve their grades, and supports parents to integrate into working life in Germany.
- Afrikaner in Dortmund (AFRIDO) is a network of organisations and church communities of African background where people can meet and talk about common interests.
- Afrikanisches Frauen-Netzwerk is a network where immigrant women of African descent meet to talk about their personal problems, experiences and to exchange solutions. Their discussions are facilitated by mentors.

More information at <http://evesreflections.com/integration-in-germany-why-job-opportunities-matter/>



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If children with a migration background are assisted to get better grades, they will have a brighter future in this country
- Veye Tatah