

Activating African journalism with BBC's Komla Dumor Award

 By Leigh Andrews

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Francesca Unsworth, director at BBC World Service Group and deputy director of news and current affairs and Didi Akinyelure, and Nancy Kacungira, winners of the first two BBC Komla Dumor Awards, share the importance of the award and the impact of winning it on their careers.

The 2017 BBC World News Komla Dumor Award is dubbed the 'search for Africa's next journalism star'. The careers of the award's previous winners – Kenyan prime time news presenter Nancy Kacungira and Nigerian journalist Didi Akinyelure, who started out as an investment banker – blossomed as expected after the win.



Unsworth.

That's because they got to spend time at the BBC honing their journalism skills through training, workshops and mentorship, also undertaking a final project in Africa to report on a story they've researched. For Kacungira, that involved a report on diaspora Ghanaians who decided to return to their roots while Akinyelure travelled to the Ivory Coast to investigate new opportunities for the local chocolate manufacturing industry. But who was Komla Dumor?

Sharing Africa's stories

Unsworth explains that Dumor was an exceptional journalist, admired by audiences and colleagues alike, so when he died suddenly at the age of 41 in 2014, all felt his loss very keenly. She adds that Dumor was passionate about journalism and encouraging aspiring journalists, so having an award in his honour seemed like a fitting tribute.

On the importance of sharing Africa's stories with the rest of the world, Unsworth says, "As a global news broadcaster, it's vital for us to report on Africa. But we want to move beyond the clichés. That's why we believe it's important that African journalists, with the knowledge and understanding of their countries, tell these stories from their perspective – not just the good or the bad, but a well-rounded, impartial and balanced story."

Now in their third year, the awards celebrate this while also giving the rising stars of African journalism a chance to work at the BBC in London to develop their skills and continue Dumor's legacy by helping tell the African story.

The two previous winners of the Komla Dumor Award referred to by Unsworth are Nancy Kacungira and Didi Akinyelure. On the importance of the awards for the journalism profession overall, Unsworth says both have made great progress in their careers as they gained the skills, knowledge and confidence at the BBC to report ground-breaking African stories to global audiences. More than this, the award helps the BBC too as they have learnt a lot from Kacungira and Akinyelure, especially about improving engagement with local audiences.



2015 winner Kacungira



2016 winner Akinyelure.

2015 winner Kacungira and 2016 winner Akinyelure share more of what they've learned below...

■ When did you first hear of the BBC World News Komla Dumor Awards?

Kacungira: A few weeks to the deadline [much like it is now], one of my friends on Facebook tagged me in a link to the award's application page, saying they thought I should apply – so I did!

Akinyelure: I applied in the very first round in 2015 but did not get through. My mum sent me the link. In 2016, my mum sent me the link once again. This time around, I was prepared for the opportunity!

■ How did winning the award enhance your career?

Kacungira: It's given me a really big boost, as my work has been featured on a global platform, but most importantly I got the chance to learn new things from a pool of incredibly talented and experienced journalists at the BBC. It inspired me to think of different ways to hone my craft and improve my storytelling.

Akinyelure: It has given me confidence. I believe in myself a lot more now than I did before. I started my career in investment banking; I made a career switch four years ago and now I know that I chose the right path. I also have a better understanding of journalism as a whole. I improved myself in many ways - from my TV presentation skills, to writing, to editing, to radio presentation. The BBC is without a doubt the best training ground for journalists. I also learnt to keep it simple and be myself which is something a lot of business journalists struggle with.

■ Why is it so important to share Africa's stories with the rest of the world?

Kacungira: It's important because our worldview and perspectives can only be based on what we know. For a long time, the rest of the world has known little about Africa, and many times the little information there was, was inaccurate or incomplete. Citizens and nations alike make far-reaching political, economic and social decisions based on this knowledge. Telling stories from Africa that reflect the complexity and nuance of a continent with 54 countries and more than 2000 languages will help to deconstruct the damaging tropes and stereotypes that have emerged in the past.

Akinyelure: As Africans, we must tell our own stories. We must always be balanced in our portrayal of the continent we call home. We must play a part in changing the perception of the continent globally.

■ Share some advice for this year's award entrants.

Kacungira: You hear it so often that it might seem cliché, but be yourself! I've learnt that the BBC is a place that welcomes and appreciates individuals bursting with new and innovative ideas, so let the real you shine through in your application. It's good to talk about the qualifications and experience that make you fit in, but don't be afraid to talk about what makes you stand out; your values, and what really motivates you and inspires you as a journalist.

Akinyelure: Read through the application properly. Do some research on the BBC and Komla Dumor. Let your passion shine through. Be yourself throughout the process. Do not doubt yourself.

No better than past winners to guide you – Unsworth adds that judges will be looking for an experienced journalist and who embodies the passion, creativity and integrity that Dumor was known for. They're effectively looking for a 'change maker' – someone who can take the skills and expertise they learn during their three-month placement at the BBC headquarters in New Broadcasting House in London and go on to make waves on the continent.

If you feel that's you or if you know just the person, you have until 15 March to enter. For more information on how to apply, entry criteria, and terms and conditions Click [here](#) and use the [#BBCKomlaAward](#) hashtag for more!

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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