

The 3rd Edition of "The GLADS-Benna Theatre Project"

We did it again! On the 17th December 2023, Gunjur Literary And Debating Society-GLADS, with financial support from VoINet EV and in partnership with VoINet Gambia, presented the third edition of "The GLADS-Benna Theatre Project" under the theme "Art: A Way of Preserving Our Cultural Heritage, History and Source of Employment" in connection to SDG 8.

In what had seemed daunting to replicate, we were able to pull together yet another program, improving the diversity and quality of performances on stage to top off last year's thereby bringing back magic and life to Benna Kunda while keeping the expenses as low as possible. With the bar raised so high from the first and second edition and the pressure to stage something better, GLADS spent the past weeks working hard and fiercely in constant communication with VoINet Gambia and other performing groups to present yet another exciting and insightful event.

Contrary to our fears, approximately 200 people showed up and constantly cheering at the performers and never wishing it ended, amazingly turning Benna Kunda into a theatre and dance club simultaneously for a moment.

Diversity and quality performance to satisfy the taste of our audience and wow them at every edition is critical to this project, so every year, we are always looking for what to add. When we started, it was just a theatre performance by GLADS, and the second edition added poetry and djembe drumming performances. In this edition, we included cultural dance, where we featured The Monkey Girl Cultural Dance Group; a group that is two months old and performing with us at Benna Kunda marks their first ever outing since its inception. This group will never forget Benna Kunda as it grows. Interestingly, the choreography they displayed on the 17th surpasses the age of the group. This denotes the foresightedness of this project; giving young people the free platform to hone their artistic talents and ideas.

GLADS, the grand performers of the day presented an interesting theatrical story in the local language, considering the audience, a story of love intertwined to the suppressed history of some Karoninka machinery warriors whose great exploits in the Foday Kombo Sillah's Jihad wars is neglected and long forgotten. GLADS also presented some carefully scripted poems through its young rising poets. We also witnessed the performances of two guest poets in the persons of Fatima Kebbeh (Da Voice) and ThaBrainSecret. Black and White Cultural Band again rhythmically decorated the event with a few selected Djembe rhythms, exploring the origin and cultural significance of each of the rhythms before beating them in the most enchanting style that got the audience constantly on their feet in an irresistible way. We are confident that this year's performance has risen the bar yet to another level.

Thus, we are grateful to everyone that made the event a success.

First, to The Monkey Girls who pulled up with multiple amazing and fun performances. The Black and White cultural band, who kept the vibes going and the people dancing. The young

poets at GLADS who at the dying minute decided to mount the stage and face their fears to give us amazing and educational performances of their poems.

We also want to show our gratitude towards the people who left whatever work they had to join us for this beautiful event and brought life to Benna Kunda.

VoINet Gambia put in hard work in setting the stage, helping with other logistics and in publicizing the event to increase the number of the audience. For that we say thank you.

We also recognize the participation of the present volunteers as they were deeply involved in the planning and implementation of the program, helping with cooking and preparing Benna Kunda for the event.

We also remember two former volunteers of VoINet who started this project with us: Turening Gassama who suggested the idea to GLADS and worked through with us to the implementation of the first theatre project and we also remember Mia who joined the crew handling lights on the first staging.

To VoINet Germany we plead for more time to find the right words to express our gratefulness of your support towards the event and for constantly going down the path with us on every edition of The GLADS-Benna Theatre Project. we say "wir sind dankbar" to VoINet EV.

We hope and look forward to working together on more editions of this impactful project.

Report by Ella, current volunteer at GLADS and Emil Gibba.