



Left: Austrian Artist Mr Werner Szendi, AAA founder Dr Christine Wallner and Mr Al-Herbish. Right: Guests choose their favorite painting ahead of the charity auction.

# OFID hosts children's art exhibition

*Charity auction raises funds for new art school in Tanzania*

BY JUSTINE WÜRTZ



**O**n November 19, OFID received members of Vienna's diplomatic corps and other distinguished guests to the opening reception of the exhibition "Together for Tanzania," which presented a colorful collection of paintings by child artists from the Arusha region of Tanzania.

The event, which included a charity auction, was opened jointly by OFID Director-General, Mr Al-Herbish, and the Ambassador of Tanzania to Austria, HE Ahmada Rweyemamu Ngemera.

The exhibition, a joint initiative by OFID, the NGO Africa Amini Alama (AAA) and Austrian artist, Werner Szendi, was the culmination of a project to raise funds to build a new art school and cultural center in Arusha.

The initiative had kicked off on September 8, on a plateau between Kilimanjaro and Mount Meru in northern Tanzania, where more than 1,000 children from five schools gathered for a painting festival.

With encouragement from Mr Szendi and AAA founder, Dr Christine Wallner, the children were supplied with paints, brushes and canvases and urged to paint "What I always dreamed of."

The result, said Dr Wallner, was "a great communal emotional event." For two hours, the children painted, at first tentatively, and then with great joy and laughter. Many of them had never held a paintbrush before and had to be taught what to do. "For all those present, the experience was deeply touching," she added.

Dr Wallner founded AAA in 2009 and has worked tirelessly in Tanzania to support local communities through numerous small projects, including an orphanage and medical center.

Addressing guests at the opening reception, Mr Al-Herbish explained that small scale, capacity building projects, such as those carried out by AAA were also "a very important aspect" of what OFID was doing. "Capacity building means that you empower people, you develop capacities, discover talents. Because no matter what you do for a country it is only the domestic people, the indigenous people, the young people who really can do the trick."

OFID, he said, was pleased to offer its headquarters as an exhibition space in which the many works of art could be displayed and to support the initiative of Dr Wallner and AAA, "who have recognized the value of capacity building, and implement it on a daily basis."

Tanzania, he added, had been a partner of OFID since the institution's establishment in 1976. "It is our privilege to assist a project that will have an impact in small communities in one of our longest-standing partner countries."

Both Mr Al-Herbish and HE Ngemera, thanked Dr Wallner for her work in Tanzania and stressed the critical importance of supporting the youth in developing countries with grassroots projects such as this.



Left: Ugandan singer, Jenny Bell, and her band. Right: Dr Wallner with Tanzanian Ambassador; HE Ahmada Rweyemamu Ngemera.

The Ambassador spoke of the “numerous challenges, be it in respect of access to education, access to healthcare, access to nutritional food, even access to shelter” that the young people in Tanzania face.

He poignantly encouraged guests to take time to have a closer look at the paintings. “These paintings tell a story for each individual child. They give us a glimpse into their minds, into what they go through every day of their lives; their hopes, their fears, their moods, their pleasures and their sorrows. These paintings are a statement by these children.”

The gala reception focused on the children who shared their dreams and whose lives will directly benefit from the sale of the paintings. Their photographs were displayed on a large screen in the magnificent OFID atrium, and each painting had attached to it a photo of the child artist holding their canvas.

Guests bid generously for the paintings, raising a substantial sum towards construction of the planned art school and cultural center.

Ugandan singer, Jenny Bell, and her band entertained guests with Afro pop and jazz, and the evening concluded with the auction of a painting by Mr Szendi of the Amini Alama tree, the symbol of AAA and of the great potential for growth, like outreaching branches, of small things. ■



PHOTO: WERNER SZENDI/ANDREAS BODE



Over 1,000 children came together for an afternoon of creativity and fun that resulted in colorful depictions of their hopes for the future.