

Renuka Pillay

(January 1959 - February 2019)

The following is taken from a news release by the office of the Minister of Education in Uganda.

As a South African, Renuka spent her life living and working in the East and South African Region, including three years at the Soloman Mahlangu Freedom Camp for South African Refugees in Mazimbu, Tanzania. She had a sound understanding of the cultural context and challenges of the African education system. She was a doctoral candidate at CIE in the College of Education at UMass Amherst. She has a Master's degree in Education from the University of Manchester (UK), as well as a higher education post-graduate Diploma in Peace and Conflict Education, a Special Needs Education and Education Foundations from Connecticut University and a Bachelor in Education and a Higher Diploma in Education from the University of South Africa.



Renuka had such a rich professional profile as an educationist, development worker and freedom fighter; and fluently spoke English, Afrikaans, Zulu and Kiswahili and had a good working knowledge of Luganda.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Renuka has left such an indelible imprint on not only Uganda's education system and reforms but also within the East, Central and South African Region, with over 36 years of experience. As Uganda, and indeed the Ministry of Education and Sports, mourns the passing of this Pan-Africanist, we acknowledge the invaluable contribution she made towards systems development for education service delivery, improved teacher quality, professional conduct and service, inclusive education that addresses needs of all groups especially the disadvantaged like girls, children with special needs and in difficult and hard- to-reach and stay areas, and promotion of policies that support teaching and learning in schools.



Renuka worked with Creative Associates, Washington DC with distinction for over 20 years in many capacities, including as Chief of Party in Uganda, for the REPLICA (Revitalizing Education Participation and Learning in Conflict Affected Areas) and UNITY projects and Tanzania (TZ21), Project Director for Zambia (ZAMFAM), and as Creative Associates East African Representative. At the time of her sudden death, Renuka had been engaged by the British (DFID) funded SESIL project (Strengthening Education Systems for Improved Learning) as a Performance Improvement Team Lead (2018-2019).

Renuka had an intimate understanding of the development challenges facing many African countries and had developed excellent working relationships with Government Ministries. In the case of Uganda, her service to the Education Sector dates back to 1996 when, up to 1999, she served as an Institutional and Organizational Development Advisor for reform activities in 36 major districts in the joint USAID, CIE-UMASS, AED, and Ministry of Education SUPER Project aimed at improving educational reforms in Uganda. The USAID funded project spanned three quarters of the country and encompassed 9 Core Primary Teachers' Colleges (PTCs), with a staff of over 300 tutor-trainers nationally. Reform activities included national trainings for all PTC administrators, Head teacher management training, primary teacher educational in-service trainings, curriculum review, curriculum development, and curriculum assessment.

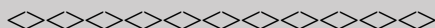


As National Programme Coordinator/Advisor, from 1999-2002 through the USAID funded SUPER Project, Ms. Renuka supported the Ministry of Education and Sports, in rolling out the Teacher Development and Management Systems (TDMS) – dubbed one of the most efficient and effective education services delivery system -, Continuous Professional Development (CPD), capacity building at the district level, and community mobilization.

For Renuka, Uganda, where her family had fully settled, had indeed become home-away-from-home, and as the East African Regional Representative of Creative Associates, she returned to Uganda in 2016 to serve the Sector she knew best – Education.

In her eulogy, Mrs. Janet Museveni, the First Lady and Minister of Education and Sports, referred to Renuka's stellar performance and contribution to the Education Sector as the legacy of a Pan-Africanist, whose contribution will be fondly remembered.

Those that worked closely with Renuka, will confirm that she was a social and caring person with a big heart for children and Uganda – a country she loved and worked for till her last breath. Fare thee well Renuka. You were such a Blessing to Uganda and humanity, in its entirety.



A moving tribute to Renuka can be found in the video produced by Creative Associates where she worked for so many years. The link is below

[_Renuka tribute by Creative March 20 2019.mp4](#)



Some of the comments we have received from those who knew her are below.



I met Renuka when I returned to pursue my doctorate at CIE. She was so nice, so smart, and so helpful to me. Among her wonderful qualities, I will always remember her beautiful face, sincere smile, kind and bright eyes, thoughtful words, deep intellect, and positive energy she carried with her. I am deeply saddened by this news.
Toon Fuderich

What a wonderful tribute to Renuka - we were all privileged to know her and to work with her.
Ash Hartwell

Oh, my heart is heavy! Such an amazing human being. Thank you for sharing JoDe Walp Baker

I've spent this last day in reflection and remembrance of times spent with Renuka. The tribute was lovely and heartfelt, capturing the highlights of the wonderful work she did and contributions made, offered by those who knew best. The world has lost Renuka's unique experience and grounded perspective and will be the poorer for it. All will miss the wisdom and compassion of this special soul, even as the legacy of her contributions continue to touch the lives of others for years to come. Renuka, we who knew you will help keep your light alive in our memories. Bonnie Mullinix

I had the privilege of working with Renuka while she was at the Center. She was a wonderful, warm woman that made such a difference in the lives of all who were fortunate to know and love her. I will miss her, the world will miss her. George Urch

Frances and I have many wonderful memories of times spent with Renuka, Keshtra and Pat - in Amherst and up at my mother's home in New Hampshire for a festive, snowy Thanksgiving one year. We have spent these past weeks thinking of those times, and mourning the loss of the bright light that Renuka was. We have been thinking especially of her family and feel keenly what a heartbreaking loss this is for them. We feel a deep gratitude for having known Renuka and for her presence in this world. Sherry Russell & Frances Hitchens

What a tremendous loss. Renuka was a force, always thinking about making a difference in the world. She was driven and compassionate about her work. We all will miss her a lot. Jeetendra Joshee.

I was one of the lucky ones who got to work with Renuka for over 15 years. When I first met her, she was leading a wonderful project she had designed in Uganda, integrating teacher training and instructional materials with support for girls' education, revitalization of local arts and dance, and community involvement – all to attract children back to school after a brutal war. I learned that when she was younger, Renuka had lived and worked in camps as part of the resistance during the apartheid period in South Africa. Her sense of the need for greater justice in the world never waned. And through it all, she remained calm, poised, focused, and curious. She was an inspiration to me, and I will miss her.

Mark Lynd

What a shock I received when I heard of the news of her death. I knew her when she was presenting about the Tanzania 21st Century Basic Education Project (TZ 21) in a conference in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. From her fascinating presentation, I could see that she had the skills from CIE and upon talking to her after the presentation; I found that that was true. Later I went on an outreach project in southern Tanzania in a place called Mtwara, I was amazed by the impact of her project, where she was the Chief of Party for Creative Associates for the TZ 21 on reading instruction to Grade 1 and II in Kiswahili, where she invented the construct of “educational buzz” that the noise coming from the class showed that her methods were working. One of the schools in Mtwara became the first in the region for two consecutive years in 2017 and 2018 after the project was over. This is the impact of the project for which Renuka’s work is remarkable.

As a multi-talented education specialist, she changed the landscape of pedagogy and training. When I was in Uganda (2017) for a national conference in Kampala, she was requested to make a presentation, which was very captivating. That is why I still feel, what she has done will make us remember her for good work in education.

*Renuka had the authentic natural love comparable to none; she was a tireless advocate for educational opportunities. She has left legacy in education in the whole of East Africa and in Southern Africa. She has made a lasting impact. What an unrecoverable loss. *We loved her but God loved her the more.* Fulgence Saronga Swai*