

# STICHTING

# DOEN

VRIENDEN  
LOTERIJ

NATIONALE  
POSTCODE  
LOTERIJ

BankGiro  
Loterij

## Maaya entrepreneurship

*In Ségou (Mali), Mamou Daffé was able to establish a socio-economic system by combining elements of Western entrepreneurship with the local concept of Maaya. Maaya is an integral concept of humanity concerning the relationship between the individual and the community. Through Maaya, people understand the importance of that relationship and learn how to act accordingly. The principles of Maaya are applicable to every aspect of life: work, leadership, politics, education, festivities, day-to-day life, art, science and so on. Summarizing Maaya, you could say that it clarifies the unbreakable bond between individual and community.*

*The 'Festival sur le Niger', a yearly cultural event held in Ségou, is organized on the basis of this 'Maaya entrepreneurship' and demonstrates that this approach to entrepreneurship is a catalyst for social, cultural and economical development.*

### **Maaya**

Before describing the festival, I will take you through some of the insights and experiences that led to the development of Maaya entrepreneurship. The concept evolved from the entrepreneurial and social activities undertaken by Mamou Daffé. Experiment by experiment, by trial and error, the concept evolved to what it is now. Understanding its origins might help to envision what the concept is about in the day-to-day reality of entrepreneurship.

One of the insights that ignited Maaya entrepreneurship comes from the video clubs Mamou worked for and owned. These clubs were more meeting places than shops where people came to rent a video. Many of them did rent videos of course, but the main reason for coming was to catch up with each other. Looking back, Mamou realized that facilitating the community had a huge impact on the economic success of his company.

After the market for videos declined, Mamou sat down with some of his employees to think about what other business they could move into. A hotel seemed like a good idea, since there was one for sale and hotels are perfect local meeting places. Running a hotel was actually quite new to all of them. So Mamou worked side by side with his employees to develop the hotel into a successful business. Acting like brothers helping each other out in good and bad times, in business and in life, they managed to create a cozy and friendly hotel where people could meet, eat and stay.

These two examples illustrate two major principles of Maaya in entrepreneurship: one is to serve the community with your company, and the second is to organize your company like a community or family.

### **Festival sur le Niger**

Since not many people stayed in Ségou for more than one night, business was quiet. Not just for Hotel Savanne (Mamou's hotel) but also for other hotels and restaurants. The question was how to get more people to spend longer in Ségou. Together with his colleagues in the hotel business and some cultural actors, Mamou brainstormed on possible ways to increase the attractiveness of the Ségou area and to valorize the rich cultural heritage of Ségou.

They came up with the idea of organizing a cultural festival. Today, the Festival sur le Niger is a yearly event in Ségou where artists of all kinds perform, exhibit and play music. The festival's declared aim is to stimulate the interaction between traditional and contemporary art by presenting the two side-by-side on stage, by holding workshops and by initiating co-productions.

Before Mamou Daffé started to put the concept of the festival into operation, he got the community involved in his plans. Local leaders, elders, religious leaders, artists and entrepreneurs were consulted about the idea of the festival and the aims pursued. These dialogues went on until everybody agreed to support the coming festival.

This points to the third principle of Maaya entrepreneurship: getting support for your company from the community.

### ***Maaya entrepreneurship***

#### ***Three community principles of Maaya***

- 1. Serve the community***
- 2. Organize the company as a community***
- 3. Gain the community's support for the company***

With the community behind it, the organising of the festival could get underway. Artists, technicians, set builders, restaurants, hotels and their suppliers geared up for the first event in 2004. Anyone who wanted to contribute was welcomed. When things went wrong the community, having agreed to support the festival, was always prepared to help out. When knowledge or experience wasn't available locally, people from further afield were invited to come and contribute and teach their skills to the local community. Step by step, the process became more and more efficient. Organizational skills like planning, producing, reproducing, distributing, control, organizing, structuring and quality became part of the way of working in organizing the festival. Maaya and effective and efficient entrepreneurship were intertwined at every stage.

### ***Difficulties to overcome***

As time went on, the festival had to overcome a number of hurdles. Some of these were easier to deal with than others. The easier challenges included finding the money for the start-up, or finding the expertise, the artists and the space to perform. A more difficult challenge was overcoming the resistance towards contemporary art. Since the combination of contemporary and traditional art is the heart of the festival, community support for it is vital.

Hama Goro, an artist and initiator of the Centre Soleil d'Afrique (a visual arts center), expresses this opposition beautifully based on his personal experience:

"Traditionally, art is part of day-to-day life. It reflects the important things in life and symbolizes important transformations in life. Being an artist is something that is given to you by birth. You perform your art for and with the community. I look at art differently. I want to express what I experience, what I see, what's in me and I want to create my own reflections on society. That is not always understood by my community. Some of them think I am lazy, or accuse me of leaving tradition behind. That's not what I want. For example, I use a very traditional language to express myself, the language of the Bogolan. I transformed this traditional form of storytelling, symbolizing community and family needs into an abstract form of visual art. The tradition is my source. I am rooted in the tradition of my country and I am educated in western art. In my work these two visions on art interact."

Exhibiting and performing contemporary art wasn't an easy hurdle to take. But because the community had agreed on the festival unanimously, it was possible to overcome this issue. In discussing the festival with the community, Mamou had been clear about his intentions: bridging tradition and modernity. Although not everybody was happy with that, the whole community allowed him to proceed on that basis. Thanks to this consensus, the resistance to contemporary art could be dealt with by bringing it back into a community dialogue. Having a consensus on values is vital in order to achieve social and cultural development. Any change that is not rooted in an agreement with the community will be resisted. Without this consensus, the traditional cannot be transformed to meet today's local and global requirements.

This example illustrates two principles for action in Maaya entrepreneurship. One is about consensus. In the concept of Maaya, any action to be taken is conditional upon consensus. This doesn't mean that you need to seek consent for everything you want to do; rather, you need to have consensus on the values underlying your actions. This consensus must be achieved by (representatives of) all members of the community, not excluding anyone or any group. That brings us to the second principle for action: include everyone.

### ***Successes***

Besides the difficulties, there were many successes too. When I talked to people about the festival, they were all very proud of what they had achieved. Some of the artists gained international recognition thanks to the festival. Local technicians are now equipped to run the festival completely, and craftsmen and women found a new market for their products. Although everybody credits Mamou Daffé with these successes, they all feel appreciated and rewarded for their contribution to the development of the festival.

This brings in the third principle for action: share success.

### ***Maaya entrepreneurship***

#### ***Three principles for action***

- 1. Include everyone***
- 2. Consensus on values***
- 3. Share success***

### ***Today's economy in Ségou***

The festival has been held for seven years now. It has grown into an internationally recognized event with over twenty thousand visitors a year. New hotels are being built, many businesses have spun off from the festival and Ségou has been put on the map for travelers and tourists. But more than that, Ségou has been seeded with small entrepreneurs with businesses they can make a living from. A good example is the story of Colette Traore, co-founder of a women's weaving cooperative: "Ten local women put our money together to buy a loom. That's how we started our cooperative. We produce fabrics for all kind of purposes. Clothing, tablecloths and bedding. Since the advent of the festival, we have grown considerably. For example, we supply the set builders with our materials. We create the costumes for some of the performers. For the festival, we work together with all the other organizations in the field of weaving, dyeing, sewing and so on. Together we ensure that everybody gets a fair share of the work so that nobody is excluded from the benefits of the festival."

Mohamed Doumbia, the administrator of the Festival sur le Niger, puts it like this:

“The whole idea has been to build on something else. For example, Mamou’s enterprise ESEF, they sell air-conditioning and do the maintenance. This organization helped Mamou create the hotel. Then there was the association of hotel managers, who initiated the festival. Initially the festival was on the shoulders of the hotel. Now the festival takes on other things, such as the cultural center. The festival enables many people to start their own businesses. One thing leads to another and another. That’s the family spirit guiding us in organizing the festival.”

Looking at the businesses in Ségou, three principles for entrepreneurship appear to be key in Maaya entrepreneurship. Colette cites the importance of sharing the benefits with others in the community. It is not about making the highest possible profit for your own business, but about enabling everyone to make a living out of the festival. Sharing the benefits assumes two principles that are alike but refer to different areas of contribution. The first is the intention to contribute to social and cultural development. The second is to share business with other entrepreneurs.

The third principle can be recognized in Mohamed’s story. He clarifies how one company unfolds from another. Many entrepreneurs owe their existence to another company or to the festival. Passing that on is the right thing to do.

### ***Maaya entrepreneurship***

#### ***Three principles for entrepreneurship***

- 1. Contribute to social development***
- 2. Pass on work to other businesses***
- 3. Foster new businesses***

### ***The magic of Maaya entrepreneurship***

The Festival sur le Niger has turned out to be a catalyst in the social, cultural, social and economic development of the community of Ségou. An economic system based on relationships between the individual entrepreneur and the community, between entrepreneurs themselves and between traditional and contemporary artists and entrepreneurs has been established. A system that could not have been realized without the fatherly leadership of Mamou Daffé or the brotherly cooperation of the community members.

Today Maaya entrepreneurship is finding its own way. Companies offer their shoulders for young entrepreneurs to step on. Almost automatically, one activity leads to another and another. Learning is capitalized upon, better understanding of materials leads to new applications, and transforming traditional skills paves the way for new products. Maaya entrepreneurship is the spark for social, cultural and economic development based on merging the contemporary with the traditional. That is the magic of Maaya entrepreneurship.

18 November 2011, Godelieve Spaas



*creating  
change*