

IFCM Africa Regional Office: Report 2017-2020

From Yveline Damas, IFCM Vice-President, President of the African Confederation for Choral Music

CONTEXT

The initial observation when I joined the IFCM Board in 2017 during the Barcelona symposium is marked by the insufficient presence of the African continent in the activities of the IFCM:

- not enough African members of the IFCM,
- no formal relay or visibility of the IFCM in Africa,
- no structured relationship between the IFCM and a formal regional organization in Africa,
- no active organization of festivals in collaboration with the IFCM in Africa,
- no significant African presence in major IFCM projects and events.

Based on this analysis, I made a commitment for my first mandate on the Board of the IFCM to implement a series of actions around a strategy to:

1. increase the influence of the IFCM a little more in Africa, by arousing more interest around its vision, its projects / activities within African choral structures, conductors and choristers;
2. make a more significant contribution from Africa to the IFCM by making its presence more visible in ongoing IFCM projects / activities.

A. Strengthening the relationship with the IFCM

- participation in Board meetings
- participation in the World Choral Expo

- presence of President Emily KUO as VIP guest of the opening of the Africa Cantat Festival online
- invitation of Iva RADULOVIC to the International Committee of the Africa Cantat Festival

B. Promotion of IFCM activities and projects for federations and choirs in Africa

We have endeavoured to promote IFCM activities and projects in the African choral network with a view to creating an effective and active presence of African choirs and conductors. This is being achieved through:

- emailing campaigns to African federations and choirs,
- publications on our ACCM Facebook page and website,
- information regularly transmitted during meetings and events, such as the *Networking Session on IFCM initiatives* during the ACF Online Festival.

In IFCM magazines

ICB and IFCM eNEWS: distribution of newsletters in the African network and regular sending of articles on activities and events relating to African choral music or choral activities in Africa to mark Africa's regular presence in these communication media.

OUTLOOK: Improve the dissemination of articles on Africa by encouraging Africans to write texts.



Le Chant sur la Lowe, Gabon, Yveline Damas, conductor, at the China Inner Mongolia International Choral Week in 2018

In IFCM projects

WORLD YOUTH CHOIR: Promotion of African candidatures within federations and choirs.

OUTLOOK: Improve the participation rate of Africans despite the difficulty of meeting the selection conditions and the economic difficulties related to travel costs.

WORLD CHORAL DAY: every year, an incentive campaign to encourage active participation in the world day of choral singing is carried out through ACCM communication channels. The participation rate remains low but steady for Africa.

OUTLOOK: Improve the participation rate of Africans by increasing the number of countries involved.

WORLD CHORAL EXPO: ACCM participation in meetings, workshops and concerts.

C. Promotion of the structuring of the African choral sector around IFCM

Support actions for the structuring of the African choral movement

- census of choral organizations active at African level
- encouragement to create federations and active structures in our member countries

Since 2017, ACCM has taken action to open up to more countries, and new contacts have been made thanks to the ACCM: in addition to the countries already members, we note the arrival of Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa and Cameroon.

- Specific supervision for Benin with Harmonie Cantat through Serge Ntcha; beginning of collaboration with Zimbabwe (through Bonny Kanyeze and Hopewell Munyari from Zimbabwe Association of Choral Music and Arts) and Madagascar (I Canto Vocal Ensemble through Fitah Rahendrasahina); as well as Congo Brazza (through Alphonsine Atta Ekomba of the Seraphim Choir, Faustin Nsakanda of the Jubilate Choir).

COUNTRIES COVERED TO DATE:

West Africa: Benin (Harmonie Cantat), Cape Verde (Festichoral,

Orfeão de Praia), Ivory Coast (MICC), Ghana (Choral Ghana, One Voice Choir), Liberia, Nigeria (AFNC, African Composers), Senegal (Afrikiyo, A Coeur Joie Senegal), Togo (ATCMC)

East Africa: Kenya (Kenya Choral Directors Trust)

Central Africa: Cameroon (Cameroonian Federation of Choral Music, Cultura), Congo, Gabon (A Coeur Joie Gabon), Democratic Republic of the Congo (Congolesse Federation of Choral Music, African Academy of Choral Music)

South Africa: South Africa (Tuks Camerata Choir), Zimbabwe (ZACMA), Madagascar (I Canto Vocal Ensemble)

North Africa: Morocco

OUTLOOK:

- *increase the number of countries covered to date,*
- *create an online database of actors organised by specialty, structures and festivals (in progress),*
- *network actors by specialty,*
- *promote and use more African expertise in IFCM projects.*

D. Support the Conductors Without Borders (CWB) programme for the training of conductors

Active collaboration in the CWB programme (of which we are an important focal point for actions in African countries) with Thierry THIÉBAUT in order to continue and strengthen the training actions undertaken with the Conductors Without Borders programme of the IFCM and the national choral federations.

- **2020:** one training session in Benin (Jan)
- **2019:** six sessions; one in Benin (Sept), one in Senegal (Mar), two in Gabon (May, Nov), one in Democratic Republic of the Congo (Apr), one in Togo (Feb)

- **2018:** six training sessions; two in Gabon (Jun, Nov), two in Ivory Coast (Oct, Dec) and two in Togo (Mar)
- **2017:** 10 stages; two in Democratic Republic of the Congo (Mar, Sept) one in Senegal (Oct), two in Togo (Feb, Nov), three in Gabon (Jan, Jun, Nov) and two in Ivory Coast (Feb, Sept)

OUTLOOK: Pursue the CWB programme in Africa by consolidating the achievements and opening training cycles in new member countries.

E. Organise events in Africa in collaboration with IFCM

- organization of the first Africa Cantat Festival: worldwide showcase and exchange platform
- online edition successfully completed in 2020 in view of the COVID-19 pandemic
- outstanding financial support from the IFCM
- LIVE version in 2021: expected support and collaboration from IFCM for sustainability

F. Consolidate the African Youth Choir (AYC) project for the IFCM Ambassador Programme

- expansion of the number of countries participating in AYC (Benin, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Gabon, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa, Cameroon) to the English-speaking area (Ghana, Kenya) to make a total of nine
- selection of two new conductors (one French-speaking and one English-speaking): Pierre KOUAME and Ken WAKIA

OTHER INITIATIVES IN SUPPORT OF IFCM'S VISION IN AFRICA

Encourage exchanges between choirs and conductors from different continents

- Invitation of Africa Cantat Festival 2020 workshop

leaders: Asia (Jennifer THAM, Singapore), Latin America (Sergio SANSAO, Brazil), USA (André THOMAS), Oceania (Lynn WILLIAMS, Australia), Europe (Jan SCHUMACHER, Germany; Jean Marie PUISSANT, France)

OUTLOOK: Encourage choirs from other continents to come and participate in Africa Cantat and festivals in Africa.

- Exchange programmes with Carleton University in Ottawa (Canada) in terms of training and sharing of experiences; online sessions through webinars led by the university with Antonio LLACA, and by African conductors on agreed themes. Start: Sept 2020.

Develop the creation of children's and youth choirs

- Creation of pilot children's choirs in Gabon (ANYOYI), Cameroon ("Les amis du Choeur Madrigal" project), and soon in Senegal.

ABOUT AFRICA CANTAT

The first edition of the Africa Cantat Festival was scheduled to take place from August 22 to 29, 2020 in Nairobi, Kenya. But in early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic struck.

The International Committee of the Africa Cantat Festival therefore had to make two crucial decisions:

- Postpone the live festival to a later date, and
- Organize an online version of the festival.

This online version has been made possible thanks to the collaboration with partners:

- ACCM (Africa Confederation for Choral Music)
- IFCM
- Mpesa Academy
- A Cœur Joie International

- ECA-Europa Cantat
- Nairobi Chamber Choir
- Kenya Choral Director Trust
- Mouvement Afrikiyo!

With the support of the Embassy of France in Kenya.



Africa Cantat 2020 Online Program

The online edition of Africa Cantat 2020 consisted of an opening and closing ceremony (on Zoom), webinars, live chats, warm-ups, association presentations, free songs and concerts, and a special event, "Sofa Safari", the interactive visit of a natural park.

A total of 22 choirs participated in the event: nine choirs from Kenya, three from Europe, one from Asia and eight from elsewhere in Africa.

According to Facebook statistics, more than 400,000 people followed this festival, and this number is increasing every day!



Webinar Conduct and Rehearsal Methodology with Jan Schumacher, Germany

What's next?

The “live” festival will probably take place during the summer of 2021, with the date still to be specified before the end of this year. Everything depends, of course, on the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Edited by Karen Bradberry, Australia