

African leaders take home lessons in community engagement

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Angella Mecha and Dr. Ashiru Abubakar, left and second from left, work with a film crew producing a public service announcement at the New Orleans Healing Center. The film project was an activity of a youth summer camp to promote healthcare careers and healthy lifestyles. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Canoeing, kayaking and feeding alligators are among the horizon-opening experiences that Angella Mecha has participated in as a [Young African Leaders Initiative](#) (YALI) fellow on the Tulane University campus this summer.

But expertise in outdoor adventures is not the most important skill that Mecha has acquired as a YALI fellow.

"I have tools now that I'm going to use when I'm working in the community," she says.

From her YALI experience getting to know academic, government and community mentors who have shared their stories, Mecha says that she has learned that for any project, "it's easier starting small." And it's essential to review strategies, reevaluate programs and go back to the drawing board, if necessary.

Mecha is the owner of Castreal Agency, a public relations and marketing company in Nairobi, Kenya. She's a social entrepreneur and community activist with a long-range plan to set up a center in the Kenyan countryside to provide a home for children who have been abused.

Mecha, along with YALI fellows Dr. Ashiru Adamu Abubakar, Christian Cirhigiri and James Bayanai, went twice a week to the New Orleans Healing Center on St. Claude Avenue ? a Tulane [Center for Public Service](#) partner ? to work with a youth summer camp.

Abubakar, a public health physician in Nigeria, says that what has fascinated him the most about his YALI experience is "the resilience of the people of New Orleans after Katrina."

What he'll take away is the sense that by bringing people together it is possible to achieve objectives as individuals, as organizations and as a community.

"It is fantastic," Abubakar says.

On Thursday (July 24), from 1 until 3 p.m., the YALI fellows will present "[Rhythms of Africa](#)" in the Freeman Auditorium of the Woldenberg Art Center. The Tulane community and the public are invited.

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