ANGELA LUNGATI

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SPEAKERS

Angela Lungati, Betty Kankam-Boadu

Angela Lungati 00:00
A lot of what also needs to come over really strongly in my journey is the different individuals who've been there at different stages of my career, who noticed a particular skill or noticed, potential, and help drive me in the right direction, whether it's the Ushahidi founders, the Heathers of this world, or the coaches that I have now. It's something that I'm also trying to be very intentional about passing along. Looking at my journey, I am someone who joined the team at the lowest level and I grew up the ranks. It would be interesting to see somebody else on my team do the same thing. And I grew up the ranks it would be interesting to see somebody else on my team do the same thing.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 00:38
Hello, and welcome to Inspiring Open, candid conversations with influential women whose careers an open ethos have pushed the boundaries of what it means to build community and succeed as a collective. I am Betty Kankam-Boadu, a journalist and women's rights advocate. Join me as I explore the fascinating backstories behind Africa's most tenacious female personalities. Inspiring Open is a podcast series from Wiki Loves Women, a project of Wiki in Africa. Be inspired, be challenged, be bold.

On Inspiring Open today is Angela Lungati. Angela's interest in technology started when as a little girl she would play with her father's computer. Now, that interest has evolved into a passion for building and using appropriate technology tools to impact the lives of marginalised people. She has over 10 years of experience in software development, global community engagement, and non-profit organisational management. She is the executive director at Ushahidi, a global non-profit tech company that helps communities quickly collect and share information that enables them to raise voices, inform decisions and influence change. Angela sits on the Creative Commons Board of Directors and is also a co-founder of AkiraChix, a non-profit organisation that nurtures generations of women who use technology to develop innovations and solutions for Africa. Welcome to Inspiring Open Angela.

Let's get right into the conversation. Let's start from the very beginning. Tell us about your childhood and how you were brought up.

Angela Lungati 02:18
Okay, so a fun fact is, I was actually born in Ukraine. My parents were in school at the time, I think I was born when mum and dad were both in second year. So yes, born in a very, very cold country. Then I probably spent about the first year and a half of my life with them while they were juggling

school, and having a small baby. But at some point, I think it became critical for them to kind of focus on studies. So I was sent back and I lived with my cousins for about six months before my mom decided, nah, I can't do this. I can't be away from my child for too long. She came and got me. And I went back with them. I was there with them until they graduated. And then we went back to Kenya.

I have absolutely no recollection of that period. In my life, I hear stories that when I came back to Kenya, all I could speak was Russian. Now I can't speak a single word of Russian. But yeah, that's basically my early life. I am the firstborn in a family of, well, three. We were three children, my brother died in 2006.

My younger brother, who's no longer young anymore, he's 18, about to finish high school, so that's fairly interesting. I guess you could say, I come from a very close knit, very loving and involved family. Had very strict parents. Very, very strict parents. But now in adulthood, I can see why. I can actually see why they were so keen, being the only girl, being the first one and just the kind of world that we're living in, just trying to make sure that they were giving me the best that they possibly could. Fairly humble upbringings. I mean, when we moved back to Kenya, we moved into, do they call them studios? It was like a one-bedroom house. And then as time went by, as my parents career grew, we moved into bigger houses. Yeah, that's how I would describe my childhood. But with lots of very fond memories of having very involved parents, who actually inspired me to do what I do now.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 04:45
Your parents are engineers, and your love for tech started when your dad brought his laptop home, right?

Angela Lungati 04:54
Yes, it is. So yeah, my mum and my dad were studying engineering at the time that they met. And when I decided to bless the world with my presence. So, all through my childhood, I have memories of dad tinkering with soldering irons, and things like that. And then they both got into the workforce here in Kenya, as engineers, so I was always drawn to do what Mummy and Daddy were doing. I think most, if not all children, look up to their parents and are like, Oh, why do you like people to go and do that. And so I always knew from a very young age that I wanted to do something in engineering because, I would proudly announce my mom is an engineer, my dad is an engineer. I think my dad came home with one of his work laptops, was I 12? Probably or somewhere about that age. And, funny thing is we weren't doing anything very specific. Like it was anything hardcore. It was, we used to play this game called Captain Claw. That was like, you'd find me and my younger brother, at that time just huddling around Dad and I was intrigued. And that is where my my love for tech grew. I'd go to school and in the computer classes, because, as much as we play that game out, I would still kind of tinker around with Word and Excel, etc. I'd always find myself feeling like I'm a bit ahead of the class to some extent, because of the things that Dad was showing me. And I thrived off of that. My love for tech is something that was ignited by my dad.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 06:31
And you went ahead to study computer science?

Angela Lungati 06:33

Yes, I did. I went to Kanda school. Kanda school is where I went to high school. And once I was done with that, I enrolled at Strathmore University, here in Nairobi in Kenya. At first it was to do a Diploma in Business Information Technology. So what tends to happen after you've graduated from high school is you have about a two year gap between the point you're then admitted into university. And for me, I didn't want to spend that two years doing nothing, so I enrolled in a course, thinking that okay, I can wait to see which university I'm called to. At the time I wanted something purely computer science. I think it was at Jomo Kenyatta University, or Kenyatta University, but then Strathmore was there and I was like, Okay, let me go ahead, let me go and tinker around, just keep myself busy, and still do something along the lines of what I like, which was tech. But as I got deeper into the course, we'd dive into programming, but then there's also this element of how the tech is applicable in the real life, on the business side of things, that really drew me in. So I graduated from that course, with the highest honours, and decided, you know what? Instead of leaving this and going to start something else afresh somewhere else, why not use these credits to then join the degree programme? So I then enrolled into the bachelor's programme for Business Information Technology. And I got in at about, I think, in second year, because I'd completed the diploma and just went through the entire programme and graduated with first class honours in 2011.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 08:13
In between the time you graduated, and the time you joined, Ushahidi, what did you do during that period?

Angela Lungati 08:21
It's interesting. In fact, there's actually an overlap. I should have mentioned this while I was telling that story. Clearly I'm a bad story teller. Anyway. I met Jessica Colaço while I was at Strathmore University. At the time, she was working for the Strathmore Research and Consultancy Centre. So I think I was probably in second year or third... second year, where I worked with her on a project somewhere in Machakos as a data collector. And that's where our relationship grew. And at some point, she transitioned out of the university to go do this very exciting thing, be the manager of Nairobi's first innovation hub. She invited me over for the launch to volunteer. And that's where I got to meet the tech scene in Kenya. I think before that, the concept that most of us who were in school had about the tech scene was, you're either working in very formal offices where you go in wearing a suit and sit behind the desk and do ABC and D things. But here, we were interacting with budding entrepreneurs who were doing... going against the grain and really trying to figure out how to solve real world problems with tech, start-ups, etc. And that's where I got to meet the Ushahidi founders. I met Eric, I met Juliana, I met Ory, and a bunch of other amazing people, including my AkiraChix co-founders.

That was really exciting. And at that point, we were supposed to find internships, get plugged into industries that we could get some of the practical skills based off of what we're learning in class, and then draft a report based on that. And I chose to intern at the iHub, because that was, it was just honestly, it was really exciting. And when I look back now, that was such a defining moment in my career, quite honestly. If it wasn't for my interaction with people at the iHub, I would probably be sitting behind a desk somewhere. Not to say that it's a bad thing. It's just there's an unconventional way about how the Nairobi tech scene or just tech in general, nowadays, operates. It's not just your usual kind of go into an office at this time, end at this time. It's really focused on the impact that the technology is having and the outputs. And I think that was the beginning of all of that just revolutionising how we're thinking about work, generally. I interned at the iHub for three months. And that's also when I got really plugged into the Ushahidi community a bit more. It was probably

two, no three years into Ushahidi's existence. The first project that I volunteered for was their elections project, monitoring the constitutional referendum of 2010.

And again, my interest was really plugged in. After my internship was done, I went back to school just really motivated and plugged in. And I would get many more of my friends to, you know, whenever iHub was having events, hey, come in, have a look at what's going on there. I was still very plugged into the tech community while I was still in school. At the point when I was graduating, I reached out again to Jessica and also reached out to Eric, about Hey guys, I'm just about to finish, really trying to find a place where I can get plugged in, into the into the workforce. And, I think, at that point, there was a bit of a tussle because Jessica wanted me to go back into the iHub. But Eric was like this one would be good on the Ushahidi end. So I got into Ushahidi as a junior software developer, and then graduated three months after joining the team as a Junior software developer.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 12:12
What is the work of a junior software developer?

Angela Lungati 12:16
So at the time... Well, a software developer generally is someone who's actively involved in building the technology as well as maintaining it. And of course, given that I was coming from school, as much as I had some experience, still needed some guidance from the seniors. So I came in kind of shadowing the amazing developers who are part of the engineering team of Ushahidi. So at the time, my role was identifying and fixing bugs, building a couple of features here and there, but not so heavy on that. But then, given my social nature, which I think goes against the grain of what many people think about developers, I'm also someone who's very passionate about engaging people. And so I would find myself in spaces where, as I was trying to find those bugs to fix, working really closely with the people who are experiencing them. So this is all say, A, B, and C, D is not working, that will then push me into a mind space of okay, let me figure out exactly what's causing this problem for this person, and then figure out how to fix it. So a lot of the bugs that I was fixing, were actually coming directly from feedback I was getting from people I was engaging with on the other end. So it's kind of like user support that then feeds into the development work. So that was a beginning of what many people term as being a human bridge began, because I had a good understanding of what challenges people were facing on the on the user front, and finding a way to then translate that into a feature that would then be helpful. So that was what my role entailed in the first few years of my life, as an Ushahidian.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 14:00
I really love that you get to bring who you are to the job. So from here, you got promoted to community developer liaison? How different was this role? And what skill sets did it require?

Angela Lungati 14:14
One thing to be very clear about is the role that community engagement has played in Ushahidi's journey. There's an element of people being able to learn and grow from one another, just a lot of knowledge sharing. And then there's also a strong bit around the community being a part of actually building the tool itself. And that's a lot around the open-source culture. And so at the time, our director of community engagement had a very, very strong, amazing woman who to this day, I think I really credit a lot of the progression in my career to Heather Leson. She had to balance out the technical end of things, as well as the user and really trying to nurture both of those communities.

Nurturing the users to really become self-sufficient, trying to surface knowledge around best practices and things that people have learned. But at the same time, also trying to nurture this open-source community, the group of developers or people who would be identifying bugs and sending in pull requests. And, for hiring the leadership team, they noticed that aspect of me being able to engage well with people, and felt that I would add a lot of value in supporting Heather on that work. So really coming into focus specifically on supporting and nurturing the developer community. So that's what that community developer liaison role was all about.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 15:53
And how many years were you in that role?

Angela Lungati 15:57
Not long, because Heather transitioned out a couple of months later. I ended up taking up the mantle of being the community manager, and then along the way, becoming the director of community engagement. I then had to hold the whole spectrum of community engagement, our users as well as the as well as the development community.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 16:19
And then you became a co-executive director, and eventually an executive director. And I think when you go through the rungs like that, there is a certain sense of ownership you bring to the job, not so?

Angela Lungati 16:36
Yes in in very many ways. I think the one of the biggest reasons that I got from the board when they were offering me this role was the strong sense of advocacy for Ushahidi's roots and the impact it creates, as one of the strong reasons why they felt that I was the best person to take over. Now, the thing to keep in mind is that during my journey as director of community engagement, there are also some really key milestones in Ushahidi's journey where it did feel like there was a bit of a tug and pull between the community's existence versus Ushahidi's general existence, and some of which I probably understand much more now as a leader. This is a story that's not unique to very many... you talk to many non-profits out there, and they'll tell you more or less the same thing. At some point in your journey, you have to figure out how to keep the lights on, you have figure out how to become self-sustainable. And at that point, for us what seemed like the best path forward was rolling our software as a service model. So basically, charge... put some feature gating on the platform itself and start charging fees for some of those features.

Now, of course, given our history, open source, people being able to access this tool for free, there was going to be some natural resistance to: why do I have to pay for this now when I haven't had to pay for it before? And at the same time, for us also think of like, this is a completely new space, the kinds of people who will be paying for a service and the kind of support they will need will be very different. And there's a bunch of things that I personally feel that if we had done differently, we probably have different results. Things like, it took us a lot of time to roll out a new version of the platform. And then at the point when we did roll it out, we didn't provide a migration path from people on the older version to the new one. I think that's where the friction around what our revenue generation goals versus what our community goals are. And I ended up becoming a strong voice for we need to stand firm around who we are as an organisation. We need to stand firm on what we stand for, stand firm on making sure that people can access our tools. Stand firm on being

able to provide value in the tool itself. And so a lot of my role then kind of shifted into doing things like documentation to help people really understand how to use the tool, doing a lot of training and support. And just really trying to surface this feature is really needed at this point. So, I guess, in many ways, I ended up being a very strong advocate for open source and our users. And at the time the board approached me, I think it was a case of, our software, the service business model, hadn't worked out as well for us until we were at a critical moment in Ushahidi's existence to really think about where do we want to go.

And so, my job over the last two to three years has been really turning that ship around, and taking us back to what many people have termed as going back to our roots. Centring our work on making the tool accessible to those who need it the most, regardless of the financial ability, strengthening our relationship with our open-source community, and rethinking how we generate revenue thinking a lot about providing our support and expertise as the thing that is a value as opposed to the tool itself.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 20:19
Being a woman who is an executive director of a global tech organisation, do you feel this immense pressure not to fail, so you can keep the door open for the next woman?

Angela Lungati 20:32
Oh, absolutely, that pressure is there. It is very real. Recognising that... when you think about women in tech, there's a lot of work that has gone into bridging that gap. And so, we're finding a lot more people in engineering, etc. But as you climb up the ladder, going to leadership, that challenge is still there. And so, I'm very aware of the fact that I'm an African woman, at the helm of a global tech organisation. And a lot of what I do could set the tone for people who come after me. A lot of it is also just me putting pressure on myself, but that pressure actually does exist. It's not only in my best interest to succeed, but it's also in everybody else's interest. Because, I and many others out there, many other fantastic female leaders, are actually setting the tone for those who will come after us. We are put in a space where we can be... it's a wonderful responsibility, but it's also a really big one. There's younger women out there who are looking at us and saying, "Hey, I'm seeing that woman up there. She's doing ABC and D." Our success could easily be tied to theirs. It actually could be tied to theirs. Our failures, unfortunately, could also lead them down another path. So that's something that I carry with me every day. What example am I setting? What legacy am I leaving behind for those who will come after me? Not only for future leadership, but for future women? For my girls and everybody else? What tone am I setting? It's a it's a big responsibility. It's a really big one.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 22:13
Now, let's get into the specifics of what Ushahidi is.

Angela Lungati 22:18
I will start off with some historic background. So Ushahidi is a Swahili word that means testimony. For those who don't know, we had general elections in 2007 that were marked by very high tribal tensions. When results were announced, violence broke out in different parts of the country, because the outcome was largely contested. Now, what was happening on the ground at the time was primarily under reported or not reported at all. I remember, for myself, I was stuck in my house, you know, glued to the TV to get to know what was going on. But there were points where there are

either blackouts, or you're watching cartoons on live television. And so, what the founders did was come together to find a way to raise the voice of ordinary people. They set up this web platform where people could text in or send tweets or send emails and talk about what was happening around them. And then that information was aggregated and visualised on a map. It essentially gave cannons a voice when no one else could or would. And it also gave those of us who didn't have information a better situational awareness about what was going on, not only around us, but even much further out. I think it was actually a very good resource, especially for people who were out of the country and really worried about what was going on. So that's the origin of the organisation.

Over the last 13 years, we've grown into a global non-profit tech company, whose mission, whose goal, is to empower ordinary people and communities to thrive as a result of access to data and tech. We develop tools and services that help ordinary people to mobilise their communities for good, empower them to quickly gather information, and share that with the world. And also, just get to understand what's going on. And we do that through our flagship platform, that crowdsourcing tool, basically a tool that allows for massive data collection from different sources. You have SMS, email, Twitter, smartphone applications and the web, to help you pull in all of that information into one place, quickly organise it, and visualise it in a way that you get a near real time feed of what's going on, but also help you figure out how to best respond to, to what's happening around you. It's been used in various categories of social impact, looking at crisis response, the Haiti earthquake is the one that we're probably most famous for, the Nepal earthquake, most recently for COVID-19, just as a way of connecting citizens with people who can help or just generally tracking what's going on at a time when very little information was being made available. It's been used a lot in the Human Rights space for advocacy. So just surfacing a lot of what might be going on, to create awareness, but then also hold people to account in some way. Also used in the good governance space, so election monitoring and corruption mapping. Think of it like whistleblowing, "hey, I saw this happening," and then being able to forward that to people who can then respond, and right now really thinking very strongly about the role we can play in the climate change space. So that's Ushahidi, in a long nutshell.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 25:43
Can you go into details, the reach of Ushahidi now, and your feelings about how technology from Africa is being exported to other parts of the world? Because, you know, this is not the place the world expects tech to come from, with all the problems that we have.

Angela Lungati 26:03
To this day, 13 years later, we are always mesmerised when we find an Ushahidi instance, in a country that we never thought it would ever be in. The tool has been used in more than 160 countries in the last 13 to 14 years. It's been translated into more than 45 different languages, and deployed more than 200,000 times. A tool that was born out of problems you always tend to associate with Africa, low bandwidth, bad governance. And I'll start answering your second question now, just because I'm in that train of thought. But Africa has always been seen as a recipient of innovation, but here we are, and it's not just Ushahidi. I mean, there's so many... we're seeing a lot, a lot of innovation coming from the African continent and being exported and going out there. And I think that applies very strongly to the Ushahidi story. I think one of the things that really enabled that wide scale reach is that deliberate effort by the Ushahidi founders to make it open source. Making sure that they were not locking out anyone from being able to access the tool, the fact that it was very possible for people to, not only benefit from using it, but also share that back by querying

back any improvements that they had made, by being able to surface lessons that they've learned, which speaks a lot about open culture and how... it just it arose almost like providing a skeleton for people to work on. And then people took that skeleton, and fleshed it up and made it their own. It also gave them that that flexibility, which was very important. Second thing is being very deliberate about also making it accessible in the way that people needed to access it. And not just making it available in English, because English isn't everybody's first language. So whether you're in Spain, whether you're in the Arabic world, that you are able to interact with the tool in the language that you are most comfortable with. And then this third one, which is also just innovating around the tools that people already had access to. Making sure that the tool is meeting people where they are. And this idea of starting with the mobile phone, and this code by the founders always pops up into my head. If it works in Africa, it'll work anywhere. Because again, you started with the lowest level as opposed to the highest one, and then to figure out how it will then break down break down further.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 28:50
Anytime you talk about building tech tools, the emphasis is always on appropriate. Why is that qualifier?

Angela Lungati 28:58
Because as technologists, it's not a bad thing. It's very easy to get drawn into something new and emerging, and trying to find a way for it to solve a problem, and realise down the line that this may not have been the best thing to use. And so a lot of the mindset shift that I've had to apply to myself, that I'm also seeing a lot of the tech world doing more of, is really starting with the problem first, identifying what the issue is, identifying who the key stakeholders are, and then having that be the guide into what to then apply. So that's how I think about the appropriateness. What is the technology in service of? As opposed to having the tech first and then trying to... it's like trying to fit a foot that will not fit into the glass slipper, really. So that that that's basically how I look at things, starting off with the problem itself. And seeing how best the technology, all of these emerging tools that we're seeing, will solve this particular problem. I think that's where innovation happens to be very honest. In my opinion.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 30:16
Yeah, I share the same opinion too. What would be the use if the tool is not the right one to solve the problem? Talk to me about funding and how you access funding and how challenging or easy has it been to keep Ushahidi sustainable.

Angela Lungati 30:32
One point of privilege that I will own, is the fact that the founders did such a fantastic job in opening up their networks, and they still do to this day. So that's kind of like one challenge out the door already, because they are well respected in the industry as leaders, as pioneers in the tech space, in that respect. And that value still holds to this day. A lot of doors that are open to me sometimes are opened by the founders. And then the fact that I'm also leading an organisation that's been here for a while. And so, there's also that reputation that sometimes plays into it. But I also have to recognise the challenge in being able to access funding, especially, as you know, an African woman based in Nairobi, Kenya, where most of the funding is coming from outside places. I think one of my biggest concerns when COVID hit was, I won't be able to have that kind of face time to be able to bring in the kind of funding that the organisation needs. Access to funding, especially for people in the Global South is very difficult, and that becomes even more difficult for women. And part of that is

a case of funders trusting or being more open to funding people who look like them, in some cases. That's one, do we trust in the people in the Global South to be able to manage this funding. And you then get into spaces where you're doing a lot more reporting and due diligence just to make sure that you're actually somebody who's worth receiving the funding, and sometimes that takes you away from actually doing the core work. And I'm not particularly sure that the same applies in in many other cases. And even when you look at it from the for-profit side, there's been a lot of uproar about funding that comes into the continent, and the faces of the founders who are there. So that is definitely a real challenge. But I think it also speaks to the fact that a lot of the funding is also not coming from here. These are challenges that could, I'm not going to use the term easily, but we could make headway if we also saw more drive from local investors, local philanthropy. It's a fairly complicated... a complicated space. For me, I would say, again, access to the right networks, having a strong evidence base of Ushahidi's impact has been something that I've been able to lean on. And just really trying to find ways of being able to tell that story more.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 33:15
It beats my mind why many local investors still don't see the opportunities that exist in this tech space. I wonder why?

Angela Lungati 33:24
I've been asking myself that question as well. And through my interactions with a group called the Bridgespan Group, I know they've also been doing a lot of research into this. And I look at it from the perspective of philanthropy first, before I jump into the for-profit side. I think what one thing that are very, very stark difference in philanthropy, say, in the US and in Europe versus philanthropy in Africa, is that philanthropy in Africa will go into the public sector, will go into fixing things like ... philanthropists will be willing to pay money to go towards a hospital or pay money to go towards education and things like that. When it comes to some of the other... the US and Europe, etc. For them, some of those systems already in place, and some of them may work or they work much better. So those gaps in the public systems might not be as big. Which opens up the door for them to be able to invest in some of the value add that non-profit to bring around some of those sectors. But for us in Africa, it's very basic. And so, I also do understand if someone has a choice between, okay, I need to put … this school here doesn't have adequate resources, I'm going to put my money into that rather than putting money into a tech organisation like mine. While it's something hard to swallow, I can understand where that comes from. So that's a distinction to make around the, the factors, motivating philanthropists in the kind of environment that they're operating in here, versus everywhere else.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 35:07
Now let's move on to AkiraChix. First of all, the name sounds really cool. How did you come by it?

Angela Lungati 35:16
I was studying Japanese while in Strathmore just as like an extra course just because I've been into mangas and my elder cousins and my now husband was also into it. At the time when we're trying to think about a name, because everybody would do this thing where they go and pick a Swahili name, I was like, why don't we check out a Japanese name. And we found the word Akira, which means intelligence and energy. And it was such an apt description of the type of women who are coming together to form this organisation. We met at the iHub lunch in 2010, around the time when I was just about to begin my internship with them. And, there was just a collective passion for trying

to get more women into the tech industry, recognising our backgrounds. For me, who was still in school for my other co-founders who are in the workforce, as the select few female developers, and trying to see how we could tip that balance a little bit. When AkiraChix began, it was, let's start with creating a community for us to get to know one another, get to connect and understand what our challenges are, and encourage each other. And as time went by, we began really by building a tree from the ground up and really solidifying those roots. Thinking about where are career decisions made? We make those decisions when we're very young. Look at me, I decided I wanted to become an engineer when I was a child. And it's because I had those role models right in front of me, I had my mum and my dad. That's not something that many who aren't in urban areas can talk about.

And so how do we begin to plant those seeds at a very young age? How do we inspire young women who are still in primary school or in high school to take up careers, show them that you can actually make it? And so, we built out a couple of different programmes. One is a training one that my co-founders have continued to lead, that targeted women from poorer socio-economic backgrounds, who had completed high school, bring them in, take them through a one-year course on technology, on entrepreneurship, then at the end of it provide job placements for them, or even help them start their own businesses.

Next programme was kids' camps, for children and children in primary school, as well as girls in high school, just a bit of mentorship as well as training over the holidays, just to give them some of those practical skills. And then another arm around community building. So just continuing those meetups where women can network with each other and running an annual conference. And I believe that that's something that the founders have continued to run, even though I left in 2017. So that's, that's basically AkiraChix. It's really amazing, the co-founders are doing amazing work right now. I believe the goal for them right now is to train more than 10,000 young women over the next couple of years. They've expanded the training programme beyond Kenya. They have students from Rwanda, and Uganda, and it's still just all about ensuring that we're tipping that balance, nurturing women who are building solutions for further communities in service of the problems in their communities, and helping them become leaders. She builds, she says, she leads.

A lot of what also needs to come over really strongly in my journey is the different individuals who've been there at different stages of my career, who noticed a particular skill or noticed, potential, and help drive me in the right direction, whether it's the Ushahidi founders, the Heathers of this world, or the coaches that I have now. It's something that I'm also trying to be very intentional about passing along. Looking at my journey, I am someone who joined the team at the lowest level and I grew up the ranks. It would be interesting to see somebody else on my team do the same thing. I am the classic example of what mentorship and support does.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 39:30
I love that. It's a beautiful thing to pay for it after you have received. The one who gives to you was not selfish. So there's really no need to be selfish with yours as well. So you know first-hand how open systems and open source have allowed you to impact the world the way you are doing. Talk to us about your world of Open.

Angela Lungati 39:54

Open is all I've known my entire career. And I do strongly feel that open has probably led me to where I am today, whether it's in terms of the kinds of groups of people that I've been able to interact with, the knowledge that I have been able to amass. It's from things like the technical skills. Even at the point when I was actively building on the tool itself, there's so much value and so much that I would learn from our open-source contributors, whether it's around something small here and there, or even just learning how different cultures work. This aspect of knowledge sharing is something that really thrives in open systems. That you'll have one person who deployed the platform for elections in that country, and another who deployed it in this other country, and then be willing to come together and share what worked for them, what worked for this other person, and finding the intersection of that to help somebody else. That is extremely powerful. And that's the model that Ushahidi has built. Or looking at some of the... whether it's the conferences and the events and the types of people that you end up being connected to. Look at the MozFests of this world, look at all things open and the kinds of opportunities it exposes you to. Like minded individuals, different ones. There's such richness in being open than being closed, to be very honest, whether it's skills development, whether it's knowledge sharing, whether it's access to networks, it's wild, to be very honest.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 41:37
Your husband is also a software engineer?

Angela Lungati 41:40
Yes, he is a senior software engineer with a company here in Kenya.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 41:48
I wonder how your home is like?

Angela Lungati 41:53
Wow. Well, I will describe it to the best of my ability. There are a lot of gadgets. There are quite a lot of gadgets, some used, some unused. So yeah, he has... because right now, we oscillate between working from home and writing from the office because of COVID. Mostly working from home. He has his own setup in one one room, I have my own setup in another room. And at some point, our eldest daughter was actually doing online classes in the in the office space that I work out of. You'd come in and find she's on her laptop there, mommy's on her laptop there, daddy's on his laptop on the other end. So yeah.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 42:37
It's a tech family.

Angela Lungati 42:38
Oh, yeah. We're proudly so. Proudly so. In fact, our struggle right now, is really teaching the kids to embrace boredom and move away from the gadgets. Move away from gadgets. So that's meant like for us, because I mean, our co-work really does need us to be on our machines, you have to be very intentional about the times when it's just us with the family, like, take a step away from the machine, from the phone, or whatever it is. So yeah, right now I think a big struggle is like my youngest comes in and she's like, "Mommy, I want to have a meeting," because she's so used to mommy telling her I am in a meeting while I'm on my laptop. There'll be time that I've gone and

gotten my lunch break, I'll come find her plopped on my chair, "Quiet, I'm having a meeting." I do not doubt that they will follow in our footsteps.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 43:31
I think they'll catch the tech bug as well.

Angela Lungati 43:35
Unless it's a very strong aversion to who we are as people.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 43:43
And I think it's good. You know, like, I think we've bought said during this conversation that we need more people, particularly women, to get to get into tech, and if they can catch the bug at an early age, why not? And my final question. What advice would you give to young girls who want to get into tech?

Angela Lungati 44:03
I think one of the first ones is, you can do hard things. You need to recognise that you can do hard things. Second thing would be do those things, even when you're afraid. Don't let your fear hold you back. Be open. Even when those doors seem like the closing, break that door open, find ways to plug yourself in. And of course, as you're going in, find ways to bring others with you, open those doors for other people. In practical ways, as somebody who's probably starting out, plug yourself into the local tech community. Right now, I think they're mostly virtual, virtual meetups, attend those. There's so much value in some of the networks that you're going to be opened to, there's so much more to learn. Be very open minded about most of those spaces. Be open to asking questions. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Nothing is stupid. Ask, always ask. And you'll receive. Be very clear about what your goals are as well. Identify somebody who can be your mentor, but also recognise that that's something that has to be driven by you as well. Take some time and really think about where it is that you want to go.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 45:18
It's been a wonderful time with you, Angela.

Angela Lungati 45:21
This was a lovely conversation. Thank you so much for hosting me.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 45:25
You've earned your spot in this industry. Angela, and it's up, up, up from here on. That was Angela Lungati, executive director of Ushahidi. Thank you for listening to Inspiring Open, a podcast series from Wiki Loves Women. This first series of Inspiring Open was funded through the International Relief Fund for organisations in culture and education 2021, an initiative of the German Federal Foreign Office, the Goethe Institute and other partners; and an annual grant from the Wikimedia Foundation. If you enjoyed today's show, subscribe on Spotify, Apple Podcasts or wherever you listen to your podcasts so you never miss an episode. Feel free to share, rate and review us. We appreciate the support. You can also tag us in your posts. We are @WikiLovesWomen on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. I'll leave you with the words of Ntozake Shange. "Sisterhood is important, because we are all we have to stand on. We have to stand near and by each other, pray for one another and share the joys and the difficulties that women face in the world today. If we don't talk

about it amongst ourselves, then we are made silent by the patriarchy. And that serves us no purpose. Until next time, look after yourselves and your sisters. And remember, be inspired, be challenged, be bold. I am Betty Kankam-Boadu and you've been listening to Wiki Loves Women, Inspiring Open.