

Islam Elbeiti

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

women, gender advocacy, startups, law reform, musician, people, music, Sudan, culture, Sudanese, open, reform, bass guitar, business

SPEAKERS

Islam Elbeiti, Betty Kankam-Boadu

Islam Elbeiti 00:00

We're not individualistic people, we're not individualistic cultures. We are cultures that thrive from Ubuntu, right? I am because you are and if I'm unable to succeed, but you're succeeding, then there must be something wrong there. We're not really being the support that we need to be for each other.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 00:24

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!

Betty Kankam-Boadu 01:02

Today on Inspiring Open, I have Islam Elbeiti, a renowned Sudanese cultural curator and bass player. Her journey to music creation began when her auntie gave her a guitar. As one of the few women who play the bass guitar in Africa, Islam had to defy the odds to prove she belonged in this field. Beyond music, she's a member of the Pan African Innovation for Policy Foundation, supporting start-ups across Africa, process development, research and pushing for reforms in start-up laws. She is a co-founder of the Sudanese Innovative Music Association. Her work has been featured on NPR, CNN, Public Radio International, Voice of America, Action Music Women, among others. Now, let's jump right into the conversation.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 01:50

You were born in Sudan, but you grew up in a couple of other places as well. Tell us about your background, and the kind of upbringing you had.

Islam Elbeiti 02:02

Great. It's really nice to be able to reminisce, I guess, on my childhood, and also to talk and reflect on the role that my upbringing had to do with where I am today. I was also very privileged to be able to move around a lot because of my father's work. So initially, I was born in Khartoum, Sudan, and we then lived in Congo for a bit and then ... and it was always like going back and forth between Sudan and other countries. I got a chance to live in DRC twice, in Addis in Ethiopia. I've also lived in China for a couple of years, Sudan, and I lived in Rwanda, but that was also for work. And now I live

in Zanzibar, for about a year now. Yeah, so I guess we've been doing a lot of travelling, growing up. It's quite interesting, because when you're young, you don't really realise how these things impact your future. And at the same time, the role that it plays in shaping your mindset, especially when you're used to always constantly changing cultures and meeting new people and re-adapting and adapting back to your own culture, and adapting to other cultures. It's been very enriching. I think, as a child, I was always sad, because we're always leaving my friends behind and so on. But today, I really, really appreciate the fact that we had access to so many different cultures growing up

Betty Kankam-Boadu 03:43

What culture would you say you were heavily influenced by?

Islam Elbeiti 03:48

You mentioned that things were different in Sudan, would you mind going into a bit of that?

Islam Elbeiti 03:48

The funny thing is, again, when you grow up, you don't realise that the more time you spend in a place, the more of that culture you start absorbing, and the more ... because as human beings, at first instinct, we want to adapt to every new environment that we have. But then I always found it so challenging whenever I went back to Sudan, because then I had to readapt to my own culture. And for as long as I can remember, I have always been trying to deny my Sudany culture in me growing up, because it was just so different from everywhere else where I lived. Now, in my present day and time, I am very proud to call myself Sudanese, and a Sudanese woman especially. But, between you and I, if I was to choose a culture that I identified with the most it would be Congolese culture, because I just felt so comfortable in Congo and Kinshasa. I felt so comfortable with the people and the music was just incredibly rich. It was also where I really started, let's say, playing music and learning music. I had spent two years just in my room practising because I'm like, I need to get to a point where I can play with all these guys out there. So definitely Congolese culture, for me was a very major shift into also, let's say, accepting or learning about my Africanism. Because in my culture in Sudan, a lot of times we're brought up, and we're being told that we're more Arab, and we're less African. But then I look at myself in the mirror, I don't look like any of these Arabs. But I was in such a critical age when I was in Kinshasa, I had just graduated from university and I moved there. And my university years were just so crazy. And I had started uni in Sudan. So when I got to Kinshasa, and I was like, Oh, my goodness, this is so amazing. The colours, the people the food. And I think, really, that's where my journey into being a more of a Pan African thinking woman, I think, really started in Kinshasa.

Islam Elbeiti 05:42

Yeah, I mean, Sudan ... I think a couple of years ago, it was just really challenging, being a woman that does not identify as a Sudanese woman, because the society wants you to look a certain way. It wants you to behave a certain way. And I never really had that. I was never the type of woman or young girl who would adhere to these social boundaries of what you can wear and how you can talk. And the patriarchy is real. It's like, really, really crazy in Sudan. And so it wasn't easy. It wasn't easy going from living in a place like China, where everything is so open, people are open, they don't look at you and the way you dressed, to all of a sudden moving to Sudan where I couldn't wear anything above my knees. I couldn't wear any ... something tight, because then society will just look at you in a really uncomfortable way. And so it was much more comfortable for me to just dress in a more, quote, unquote, decent way, although I disagree with that, but this is the word that came

to my mind right now. So growing up in that, trying to challenge that, trying to always fight against society, just for me to be able to coexist, but coexist in the means that I can proudly identify with, but rather than coexist with what society wants me to look like. And that has always been my biggest fight with my culture, which is this Islamic culture that was you literally shoved down our throats all these years ago, has really tainted the image of the culture itself. A lot of our traditions that were very open and very expressive of woman, womanhood, social cohesion, all somehow were killed because of this Islamic regime that took over. Which is very sad. I think growing up, these are the things that I can remember from Khartoum,

Betty Kankam-Boadu 08:09

When you go back to play there, are you, for want of a better word, judged as a Sudanese woman or you are judged as a tourist?

Islam Elbeiti 08:20

I mean, I was living in Sudan until last year, where I decided to move. So I had spent about four to five years there, maybe from 2017 up until 2021. 2020 even actually. Then I decided to just make a move to Zanzibar, where at least I would have ... or to Tanzania, where I would have a much more just a different eye of things because it got really exhausting. But of course, being a woman, and being a musician, and being a very outspoken person, and a person who's very proud and wearing my Africanism wherever I can, it was not easy. Because according to society, everything that I was doing was just so wrong and so false. And I always like to tell my parents ... the first fight I had to have with society was with my own parents, until they got on board and then they became the most supportive people that I have in my life right now. But yeah, I would go to a concert or a gig where I'll be playing a show and the looks, and I always had like my hair out Afro funky, whatever. People would look at me funny, they would make comments. These things were very uncomfortable. And for a long time, it was building up or creating a lot of anger inside of me towards my own people, which I really didn't like, because I didn't want to feel so uncomfortable. And with my work and what I was doing, I was constantly travelling, and allowed me to see a lot more different African cultures, which then later made me realise, I don't really feel like I belong in Sudan at this moment of time, because it is not allowing me the space to truly express and be comfortable. And even though things have changed now, and things are much different and much more open. I think my generation is still quite traumatised by everything we've been through in Khartoum. Especially as a woman. And even if ... I'll tell you a story. So in Sudan, up until 2019, every party has to end at 11pm. And a lot of the parties, especially parties that involve people drinking and whatever, alcohol because that's prohibited in Sudan, there's always a risk that a police van will come and take us all to jail, because we were either partying or we were in a place that had alcohol, even though we weren't drinking. So that that fear is always there, especially if you're a woman in this context. It is just really horrible. Because if it happens that we get arrested, and we go to the police station, it's not just me that's in trouble. It's me, my father, my sister, my brother, my uncles, the entire community that I belong to is going to get frowned upon and talked and badmouthed. And jump ahead to 2020 pre-pandemic, we were having these crazy parties, but a part of me was still scared. And that's why wouldn't go to any of these parties. And they're like, "Islam, don't worry, everything's fine. No one's going to arrest us." I was like, "I don't know. I'm just very, very anxious." So that, I think for me, that experience was just ... it's really traumatising. And it's just hard to, I think, break from this trauma. Especially, if it's been there for a really, really long time.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 12:06

So you mentioned that it took a while for your parents to get on board with what you were doing and who you had become, or who you were becoming, as a woman? How was that onboarding process?

Islam Elbeiti 12:25

It's a really interesting part of my life as well, because it was a definitive moment in the kind of path that I will take. So my parents and I have always had a very, very strong bond, and a very strong relationship. My mom has always supported what I did from the get go. And my dad, in the beginning, not so much, but mainly because of the work that he does, and it was quite a quite a sensitive situation. Whereas me performing on stage and stuff would be quite a problem, actually, for him. Not for him with his views, but for the way that society would perceive him and his work. And I remember, sometime, beginning of 2018, or '17, I did a CNN feature on African voices. And I remember right after that feature, my dad's perspective completely transformed. He went from being very ... and he wasn't the type that would just not allow me to do things. Where a lot of Sudanese parents do that. They just straight up don't allow their daughters to do anything. He was very okay with me doing it, but I know he wasn't very happy about it, but he couldn't stop me. And after that feature, I remember one day, we crossed paths, I was heading out for a gig and he was coming home, and he goes like, "So Islam, where you going?" I'm like, "Oh, I'm playing a gig." He's like, "Oh, how much money are you earning?" And then I just looked at him and I just laughed because, for me, that was kind of an indication that he had accepted what I was doing and also starting to see the fruits of my labour, let's say, because I was working really hard, like three years or so trying to just improve my musicianship and just gain the support. And I've always been a rebel my whole life. I don't think it was any surprise to my parents that this is the kind of person that I would turn out to be. Ever since then, it's just been really incredible with them. My dad retweets all my posts of performances or he likes them. He tells his friends about it, and I think it's just it's just really, really nice.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 14:41

Beautiful. So what kind of values did your parents raise you with that you still hold on to til today?

Islam Elbeiti 14:50

My parents are just really some of the most interesting people. They both grew up in very different environments and both come around carrying a lot of different experiences. But I always remember, everything my dad always said, when we were living somewhere and we're having this very lavish life or whatever, and he would say, "Just always remember where you come from. You're not from these big tall building Berlin, but you're from the desert, you're from here, and you have to always cherish that. And that everywhere you go in the world, you're going to be a foreigner, except for your own home." At first, that statement was quite contradictive for me, because I'm like, what if I don't even feel home at home in Sudan. Because for me, the definition of home has always been where my family is, just because of the nature of our lives. And, now, I really understand where he's coming from. And of course, all the other values like just being honest, and being transparent, and just always owning up to your decisions and owning up to your choices in life, I think that's very valuable lessons, especially when you know, as a person, you're trying to go into a path that is totally different from what is expected of you. I come from a family of highly academic people with crazy careers, and so on. So it wasn't going to be easy for me to just say, okay, I'm going to turn into a musician, and whatever, this is this is what I'm going to do. It was it was hard, and I think it still is hard. But now I just don't worry about what anyone thinks anymore. And I think that's also

something that I've learned a lot from my mother. She's like, "Own your own experiences. Own the things that make you feel happy or alive or comfortable. And if it makes other people angry, but you're not necessarily hurting anyone, then it's also okay." And I think just to build up on that, as well, is that my parents always told us, especially when it comes to spirituality and religion, and it's that really spirituality and religion is all about treating other people very well. And that, if that takes place, and if that is a part of who you are, then you're just naturally going to have an easier life, let's say. Not to say that life is just always easy, but I think that's always what I like to think every time I'm experiencing something new.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 17:33

At what point did you realise that I want to be a musician? I want to be part of the people who create this beautiful thing called music, and not just be a listener?

Islam Elbeiti 17:47

This is a bit ... very interesting, because I've never really thought about when did I decide that I want to be a musician? For me, it was always like, oh okay, this is happening. Let me just go with the flow. I've always been a person who plans only three days ahead, and maybe have some long-term goals, big, big goals. And then I just work a little bit here and there. But yeah, growing up, we always had music playing, everywhere, all the time, especially the times where we lived in Kinshasa. I think one of the reasons I started to learn music. I had one auntie, she was just ... is still one of the most influential people in my life. And she just handed me down one of her guitars, or her only guitar, and she said, "Yeah, okay, go ahead and learn." And that's how I started. And then I realised that it is so difficult to be a professional musician as a woman in Sudan. And not like singing, because that's also another worldwide global perspective of women in music, which is, people just always just presume that you're a singer, for whatever reason I don't know. And that was also one of my other challenges was like, every time I walked into a gig where the musicians ... either it was a jam session, or I'm just coming in for the first time, they would expect that I was singing and I was like, "No, I'm here to play bass." And then their faces to start looking are funny and stuff, because they don't think that I can do it. And I think before that, having had a few interactions with men, men who play music, there was always this sense that you can't do it. This is not an instrument for women. And the kind of person that I am, this is exactly the kind of challenge I need to start doing something and being really good at it. Because if you telling me that I can't do it, then I will definitely show you that I can and very, very well. And that was my motivation for the first couple of years when I started, it was just to just prove people wrong. And then always leave space for other women to think that it's very doable. And I think that is one of my biggest motivators and inspiration when it came to deciding that I wanted to be a musician, aside from the fact that I loved it, but I was able to see that other women were also able to feel comfortable, especially the younger ones, because they saw that I and other like fellow female musicians were able to do this. Because we all know how much of a fight it is in our society to play music. And that was the feeling I always had on stage. It's like, oh, man, this is amazing. There's a young girl who's going to be able to see and say with herself that one day, if she can do it, that I can do it as well. And these are the things that I still live by and carry very, very strongly, I think, in my persona. Which is that any woman is always inspired by another woman who is doing something that is not normally okay for women to do. And I think also, my main influences when it came to music, were also highly women. And especially when it's a woman from the same environment where you live and grow up, and you're able to see that this woman is doing it and you're like, "Okay, well, if she could do it, then so definitely, can I." So I think, to answer your question, 2017 is when I started really playing concerts

and stuff. And then I had a bunch of mentors, who were very, very persistent with me taking this very seriously.

Islam Elbeiti 17:57

That guitar your auntie gave you was not a bass guitar. I find women who play the bass guitar badass. It's such a rebel move for me. It's so badass. What drew you to the bass guitar?

Islam Elbeiti 21:53

Now that I think about it, for the same reason that you're so excited about seeing women play bass. For me, I always saw that when women were playing music, at least in my surroundings, they were either singing, playing guitar or playing the piano. But I barely saw any women playing bass. And I think it also has a thing to do with someone I was dating at the time, when I was starting to learn music. He was a bass player as well. And even way before that, I was like, I really, really want to learn bass. But I think he's definitely one of the major people that have pushed me to do it. Although he refused to teach me anything. He said, "I will never teach you. Go learn everything yourself." Which I really, I am so grateful for. Because if he had taught me, then I would have just been playing like him. But then, because of his advice, I was able to just discover my own sound and who I want to be as a bass player. So I definitely think it's because it's one of the most badass instruments that a woman can play or anyone can play, but particularly when women play bass, and they're really good at it, it is just mind blowing.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 23:03

It is mind blowing. Men who play the bass and women who play the bass guitar, who do you think get more recognition? You are in that field. Do you think that women get as much recognition as the men do?

Islam Elbeiti 23:23

I think we get even more recognition, if you ask me. Because once you get to a place where people start knowing you and booking you for gigs, then it's because there's very few of us. And the very few that exist are very popular in a sense or the other. I know a lot of other bass players who are far more better than I am. But they don't get quarter of the recognition that I get, at least like with media or whatever. And I think it's because, I don't know, maybe I'm incorrect, but I think it has something to do with the fact that, because there's not a lot of women who play bass, especially on the African continent. I know a bunch of really incredible women who play bass like from Kenya, this woman called Tunu, from Ghana, from Nigeria, and Sudan as well. There's a bunch of really incredible women who play bass. So I definitely think so. I think, yeah, we get a bit more recognition, just because we're not as many as the men.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 24:25

That's really nice. I saw your African Voices feature on CNN. I think there's a social change aspect to you playing your music, you play in your bass guitar. What is this message of change that you strive to send across through your music?

Islam Elbeiti 24:48

I think our idea of change definitely changes over the years. It's either because we grow and have a better understanding of the social construct. Or we have a better understanding of who we are as human beings. But I think since the get go, one of the reasons I was always advocating for women

and music was just simply because it's very powerful. And women have the potential to reach extremely, really high levels of proficiency, whatever the word – who is the music? – because we always have to work a lot harder than the men, because we're just expected to be average, to be below average even. When we walk into gigs, they don't expect that we can play anything. And, for me, just seeing the fact that we actually can and we can do really amazing stuff, then that kind of became one of my you know, my drivers is that I want more women to play music, and to take on instruments that are seen as challenging or seen as difficult for women, because no such thing exists. And I always say this, every time I speak to anyone about gender, and music is that really music knows no gender. And we should not be part of creating this gender-based differentiation when it comes to musicians. I want every single woman, when she's playing on stage, that people are not interested in her because she's a woman playing music, but because she's a very damn good musician. And because these are some of the things that I also really struggled with in the beginning, when I started playing, was that I always felt like any positive feedback I was receiving was mainly because I'm a woman and I was doing something that other women are not doing. But in reality, that's not really the case, I want people to have positive affirmations and positive feedback about my playing because I'm a good musician, and not just because I'm a woman and also a good musician.

Islam Elbeiti 27:00

So it's trying to eliminate this idea that women are not as good as men in music. And I think nowadays, my advocacy has really shifted more towards empowering the educational side, education, especially when it came to women. Whether I was giving masterclasses or co-founding a music academy in Sudan. It caters to everyone, not just women. But still there's a lot of women teachers, and doing the same kind of work in different countries. And yeah, just pushing for more and more women to take on this role, and to take on this challenge and to just supporting each other to grow as a community of incredible women who play music.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 27:50

Interesting. Do you have this pressure to go international, and by international I mean win an award from, say, the West? I ask this because here in Ghana, we have great musicians. And sometimes when a musician in Nigeria, for instance, wins a Grammy, then all the great musicians we have here are made to feel like they are a bunch of noisemakers.

Islam Elbeiti 28:19

Less.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 28:19

Yes, they are less, because they haven't won a Grammy or they haven't won some other award from the West.

Islam Elbeiti 28:26

This is the problem with wanting to be recognised by the West. It's such a problem because it's like, this is kind of what we all work towards, or think that we want to work towards. We want to be recognised in the West. And if we're not recognised in the West, then we're not really recognised at all. And this is so false, because, I think, I know, some of the most incredible musicians in my life in Sudan, whether it's composers, and their music is just incredible, but they don't even have a Spotify account. And, I think this is also the clash between Nigeria and Ghana and all this division that is

happening in our continent, it's just not in its place. And we really need to work towards really acknowledging ourselves as artists, as communities within ourselves, and not to seek just Western recognition. Of course, recognition is amazing, because it means more money, but at the same time, Burna Boy or Wizkid wouldn't have been able to win a Grammy like four or five years ago. And there is a lot of discrimination against African artists, I believe, globally in the award system or whatever. But that doesn't mean that we don't seek to go international. And for me, when I say International, I really just want to reach out all over the continent. I personally do not have a lot of interest in having any awards from the west or whatever. But rather, I would just love to be able to play a lot of African music, tour around the continent, experience different musical cultures. And if I win an award, I would love for it to be an African award for something, rather than ... of course, it would be amazing to win a Grammy, I'm not gonna lie. But it's not easy to do such a thing.

Islam Elbeiti 30:19

So I think the other point, for me, that's also a bit important was that last year was the least musical year I've had. I think, most musicians, for most musicians. And that's why I wanted to solely dedicate this year to creating more content and pushing it out. Because I've been mainly just practising, but I'm not posting anything, I'm not sharing any of my upcoming work or the things that I'm working on. So I think it's just really us working, having inspiration from each other, and wherever that leads us, let it lead us. But I might even be contradicting myself because I say this because I have different means of income other than music. Because if I was just a musician, I'd be very poor. Because it is really, really difficult to make money out of music. It's really difficult, when you're not touring in Europe, or touring in America, those things are just really, really challenging. So it's easy for me to say, well, I'll work on this tomorrow or next next week, because my next meal doesn't depend on my music career, but rather depends on my full-time job. Which is a privilege that not a lot of musicians have. And even if they do have it really takes away from your own craft.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 31:41

And about making money in music, will I be wrong to say that singers or vocalists make more money than instrumentalists?

Islam Elbeiti 31:52

Definitely. I mean, singers, in most cases, at least from my experience, make the most money, because they're seen as the lead entertainers. But then of course, you have the band, which is really the backbone of everything, nothing would ... the singer wouldn't really necessarily exist without the band, especially when we're talking about the live music sector and the touring sector. And to that, I will also say that a lot of instrumentalists if not like a massive amount of us are always underrated, because we're not seen at the forefront, or we don't earn as much as the vocalist in the band, for example. I think you're not wrong, at least here in our continent. That's what I've seen in most of the places where I've lived and worked, that the vocalists make the most money.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 32:41

And that's why I'm so happy about the whole live band taking over. Because now if you are a recording artist, you should be able to sing live. It's an expectation of you now. You can go into the studio, just sing and then your music is a hit. And then when it's time to perform and perform it live, you're just a mess on stage. And for me, I'm happy because I feel then everybody gets to have a piece of the cake. So the organist, the bassist, everybody will get to show their talent, and then also get a fair share of the cake.

Islam Elbeiti 33:20

Yeah, exactly. A lot of the studio artists really are popular in the studio, and you hear them on stage. I mean, one thing that upsets me the most about live performances is when a singer's lip synching. Am I a fool that I just pay \$100 to see you so you can lip sync your studio recording? But at the same time, and I love that about the Ghanaian music industry in general is the quality is so high up that you just have to be really good. And I've played with Ghanaian musicians before and trust me when I tell you they are the finest I have seen so far. And this is also to say maybe to even let you know that you should definitely go to +233 and check out the jazz band over there. Probably some of the finest musicians. But yeah, I think everywhere should strive to be like Ghana, when it comes to live music and quality of live music.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 34:19

Now let's move to your day job. What do you do for your nine to five job?

Islam Elbeiti 34:25

What do I do? I'm the Community Engagement Lead at I4 Policy we call it, which is pretty much a foundation that focuses on inclusive reform. By inclusive reform, we mainly work with startups in the startup ecosystem in different African countries. And we support with methodology and process development and research. We're really pushing for a more inclusive reform in our continent, especially when it comes to laws. Yeah, so we've been mainly focusing on startup laws and startup processes, co-creation processes in the continent. So yeah, I work with a fantastic team of young, brilliant Africans. The thing is, it's really such an interesting foundation and the work that we do, because it's extremely different, but it's also extremely beneficial. In the world of policy and lawmaking, it is always a top down approach, it is always like, okay, the government sits together, and they decide, alright, this is what we're going to do, we're going to implement this law, and then they discuss within each other and ask a few stakeholders. But what we're doing is ideally, shifting the weight from it being a top down approach to a bottom up approach of reform. For example, we bring the entire ecosystem together, like the startup ecosystem, and then we train them on our process, and just how to have inclusive dialogue and inclusive reform and inclusion across the board. And then we, for example, develop a policy recommendation for startups. But this policy recommendation is really coming from the users of these policies, if they're ever to be implemented. And that, ideally, gives more legitimacy to the law, more legitimacy to the reform, because it has been consulted with the broader community, it has been co drafted with the broader community. So that really creates a different type of energy when we're talking about democracy when we're talking about reform, is that true citizen engagement is really the way to go.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 36:48

In your line of work, you speak to a lot of young people trying to start businesses, right?

Islam Elbeiti 36:53

I mean, yeah.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 36:54

And what are some of the common issues that come up?

Islam Elbeiti 36:57

I think really, one thing that is always common everywhere is registration, taxes, resources, whether it's intellectual resources, there's also a problem with intellectual property and IP management in general. And I think inflation is just happening everywhere. So it costs a lot more to produce what couple of years ago wasn't so expensive, because you can't ask someone, hey, start your own business. But then you don't have any laws in place that make it easy or accessible for people to start their own businesses. It's very, very challenging. But we definitely see a lot of governments really working hard towards encouraging more businesses to thrive, and also creating the right environments for those businesses to thrive.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 37:50

I think that entrepreneurs don't have honest conversations. I was recently talking to... actually two friends of mine who were telling me how they are struggling with their businesses and their environment currently does not support their work. And it's just been so difficult, trying to keep the business going, and also paying their workers and all that. Because for some of us, looking from the outside, we think that you are successful, your businesses are thriving, maybe it's the fake it til you make it thing that people say, but I feel that if people have honest conversations, it will really help.

Islam Elbeiti 38:32

I think it's really this social media disease that we have, where we access everything through social media, all of our friends through social media, all the businesses through social media, but social media is all about being perfect. And the point that you made, it's just so valid, because a lot of times, you will think that someone is doing amazing, because of what you consume in their social media. And then when you speak with them, they're awful, they're depressed, their businesses are not working, everything is hitting rock bottom. And I think you're right, you know, we need to have open conversations, but it's also about building the value of trust amongst each other. The fact that if I tell you my problems, you won't go and make a business out of it. And even if you do, then you involve me in that business. I think a lot of us have a problem of an issue of trust amongst each other. And we have just not been able to really be as communal as we naturally are as Africans, to like really trust everyone with your information. And this is really hard because I think this this culture of individualism is becoming much more and more popular, which is quite a problem, I think, because we're not individualistic people. We're not individualistic cultures. We are cultures that thrive from Ubuntu, right? I am because you are. And if I'm unable to succeed, but you're succeeding, then there must be something wrong there. We're not really being the support that we need to be for each other. But rather, we're being just there for us to win. And it doesn't matter who loses, as long as we win. So I think, yeah, having open conversations about our common problems, and building that value of trust amongst each other is so vital to our togetherness, as Africans, to our togetherness as a community and to our future as a continent. I love how this conversation went from where you grew up to music, and then talking politics now.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 40:44

I know, right?

Islam Elbeiti 40:47

Yeah.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 40:48

How important is collaboration and support in your work?

Islam Elbeiti 40:54

Yeah, I think musically, anyone who's ever made it, has made it through collaborations. If you look at any of the artists right now that are thriving, they really build a lot of their music on collaborating. I think when it comes to work, and in that sense, we would refer to it as partnerships, let's say, they are also very vital. And I think, again, it builds on that idea that without other people, you can't really do anything.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 41:24

What does Open mean to you?

Islam Elbeiti 41:26

If I look at it from different angles, open has a lot of meanings to me. It means transparency, of course. It means that also we open our hearts to receiving love, and to receiving constructive criticism. We open ourselves to the world, we open ourselves to different cultures, we open ourselves to our ability to achieve incredible things if we open our hearts and open ourselves to receiving. I think I also think a lot when you say open, I think about open source. So open-source technology, having much more of that available to people, because that's really an incredible way to decentralise our systems and to make them more accessible to people. And because I spent a large majority of my adulthood or my professional life in Sudan, I know what it means to not have access to very basic platforms that people would normally have access to, because of being sanctioned for so long. So we always, always cherished and really appreciated open source material, because then it gave us access to things that in any other situation we wouldn't have access to. So I think yeah, open for me means access. It means love. It means healing. It means vulnerability. And it means togetherness as well.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 42:58

And to wrap it up, what future, Islam, do you want for Sudan as a country, and then for Sudanese music?

Islam Elbeiti 43:11

if you've touched me at a very sensitive point. But I mean, I think the future I want for my country is really a future where my people have managed to heal from all these horrible things that we had to endure as a community and as a country. For me, I see a future in Sudan, where it fits everyone like it should. I see a future where we have young people at government, where we have democracy, true democracy and not what the West advocates for. I see us being like a truly independent country and our people independent and able to learn and get access to education like anyone else has in the world. I just really would love to see a Sudan that is very peaceful and safe, and expressive and accessible to everyone and particularly Sudanese people. So yeah, I definitely see that. As for Sudanese music, I think we have an incredibly bright future ahead of us. The music industry we have, because of the sanctions and just being far away from the entire world for so long, we are now out of space where we can really share and work and build on our music cultures, that there's things that no one has ever heard before. And trust me when they hear it, it's going to be mind blowing. So I can't wait for that to happen. I can't wait for the world and for Africa, particularly, to be able to experience Sudanese music. Indigenous Sudanese music.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 45:00

It's been such a pleasure talking to you, Islam.

Islam Elbeiti 45:03

It was really nice speaking with you Betty. Thank you for being such an amazing host.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 45:08

Keep being the badass bass player that you are, Islam, and I wish you all the best in your upcoming projects. 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 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 at @WikiLovesWomen on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 45:59

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.