

Interview

It's All About Hope...

By Reut Schwartz and Jacob Sztokman

This year's Glocal cohort has many diverse and talented individuals. We interviewed three Glocal students who have not had an easy path in life and who have overcome colossal obstacles to devote their lives to international development and making the world a better place.

Meeet Amal, Annett and Sylvain, 3 inspiring

Glocal students with powerful messages of hope.

We asked our outstanding colleagues what advice they have for people in difficult situations to enable them to help themselves as well as what messages they have for us all.

Amal Khayat

With her father in prison for 16 years, a mother working full time to pay the bills, family feuds, and living on the brink of poverty, you might think Amal, from the village of Silwan in East Jerusalem, was destined to fail. However, not only did Amal rise up from the hardships of her childhood to receive a BA in Pharmacy and now work towards her MA at Glocal, Amal is a beacon of positive energy, encouraging attitude, and an emissary of hope.

“Look where you are not supposed to look, to the things that nobody wants you to know.

Make

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your own narrative. When my dad was against me coming here I told him that I am my own person and this is my choice and this is how I run my life.

We are not created to be followers; each one of us is different. These differences are what make us unique.

We should try to make peace with ourselves and our differences, [only] then you can make peace with the others. And also, try to put yourself in someone else's shoes, and to imagine what they have been going through all of their lives. That is how we become more tolerant, open-minded and not judgmental. The world is not black and white; it has so many rainbow colors, and every color will take you to a place of which you have never dreamed. So just go and be yourself, the one you know, not the one who other people say you are or what they want you to be."

Annet Apio

At the tender age of 12, Annet lost both her parents to AIDS. When she was 17 she found out that her twin brother had been born with the disease. Sent to live with a dispassionate aunt in another part of Uganda, Annet was sent to one of the worst schools in the country where she developed low self-esteem and the belief that she was dumb. But after learning about the health situation of her brother, Annet turned her life around, studied hard, and graduated high school with honors. With the constant threat of not being able to pay tuition, she taught herself to make jewelry, opened a jewelry shop (which she ultimately left because of conflicts with her former business partner), and completed her BA in Social Work. Later, she worked as an administrator for an INGO operating in a slum community in Kampala, Uganda.

"I have learned that challenges are a part of life and it is up to you to choose whether this challenge is going to break you or make you. By that I mean it will be hard and painful, you have a lot to lose, but you just have to choose. Losing doesn't mean you have failed. And I know from losing my parents, from the pain of losing my business (it was my baby!), and living in poverty for most of my life, that from these experiences I actually learned a lot more than I lost. I learned to be flexible and to take advantage of even the smallest opportunity that presents itself. Do not be afraid to take risks. I struggled a lot with my family deciding that I will move out of the home because I wanted to be independent. It was difficult for them because they needed me to help out at home, but I needed to follow my dreams. I had to take a risk, moving away from home. I had nothing; I slept on a floor for a while. But I knew that you have to take a risk, otherwise if you're afraid so much to take a risk you will remain at the same position in life and you won't be able to achieve anything.

I believe in doing good—not for an immediate benefit, but I believe that to be able to give is enough to receive already in itself. You don't have

to see a result immediately or expect return

by helping others, but it is the only way that many people have been reached.

Even though they did not have hope, they found hope. They become hopeful when someone says something good to them, or by receiving a meal that they would not otherwise have received. It changes so much about someone in a way that you will never understand. You just don't know how much you are doing by giving and you cannot measure its value.

It does not matter what your background is or how difficult the situation is for you. You can be whatever you want to be. Challenges should be faced head on. That is what makes the difference. A challenge should not stop you; it should be the reason for you to excel.”

Sylvain Ruhamy

With a law degree under his belt, and at the beginning of a democratic election after decades of dictatorship in his hometown of Bakavu in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sylvain was excited for the future. Everything changed suddenly one day in 2006 while Sylvain was disseminating information about how democracy works and about the steps people could take in order to make the elections more fair. On that fateful day, then 25 years old, Sylvain was kidnapped, tortured, and left for dead on the side of a dusty road. It took a month for the Catholic priest who found Sylvain to nurse him back to health. Sylvain was believed to be dead and if he were found to be alive, government or rebel forces would want to kill him; he was a wanted man. So, dressed as Christian monk, Sylvain was spirited off to Tanzania and then to Kenya where he found himself as a refugee in a refugee camp. Despite losing so much of his former self—family, friends, language, and career—Sylvain taught himself English and taught English and his native French to other refugees. While being employed as a teacher for refugees, Sylvain worked closely with the Israeli NGO IsraAID, and one of their team members directed him to the Glocal program.

“The realization that I was a refugee in Kenya was a turning point in my life. I started to live

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positively. I was in a place where I saw violence and I really think about it every day. Social justice, equality, human rights, those are things that are always in my mind. I don't like people living with violence, victims of injustice and inequality, because I believe that in the world there is a place for everyone. We have a lot of resources. There is no reason for some people to have more and others to have less. I believe in the equal distribution of the resources of the world and this is one the causes that speaks to me, and for which I am even ready to die.

People should live, and the resources that are there should make life easy to live, not to make people victims of inequality.

I cannot say that self-reliance is something that I did on purpose. I did not plan on leaving my country. I did not plan to look for asylum. It just happened. I realized that I survived. It is

difficult to keep a positive mind even in a difficult situation. I have always believed that everything that happened in my life is for a purpose. I keep asking myself why these things happen and take it as a learning experience. I don't start blaming anyone but just look at challenges as tools to build me. Anything that does not destroy me makes me stronger and that is what keeps me going. Some challenges actually made me stronger than before."