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Building Social Bridges
by entrepreneurial thinking



Role models Germany





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Nadine Nana Ngantcha: „I like to approach people.“

About me:

My name is Nadine Nana Ngantcha, I am 42 years old and was born in Douala / Cameroon. I come from a family of 5 children, I am a single mother of two children, and I have lived in Germany for almost 20 years. I studied business administration and I work at baobab zusammensein e.V., a network for the health, promotion and participation of African migrants in Lower Saxony. I speak Medumba, German, French and a little English.



Engagement:

I have been involved in various African and non-African associations here in Germany for years. About 6 years ago I met baobab e.V. in Oldenburg. It was about the prevention of HIV in the African community. Empowerment of African women was also a topic. That appealed to me a lot, because I had so many burdens, so many hurdles due to my life here in Germany. Sometimes I thought I was alone with my problems. Through this meeting with baobab I realised: Oh, I am not alone with this problem! There is a way to do something about it, to get involved. As a single mother, I realised that there are so many women who also live alone here in Lower Saxony with their children. Out of pure conviction, I am now involved with baobab.

Obstacles:

I was 20 when I came to Germany, alone, without a family. I did my German course in Cottbus and then I suddenly realised - here in Germany - that I am black. Sometimes people think, how can you say that, but no. When I grew up in Africa, I was just a girl, a young woman who wanted to live her life. I wanted to study, but all of a sudden I realised that this skin colour I have is a problem. That was my first hurdle here in Germany: to realise that as a black woman it won't be easy here.

Language is also an obstacle. If you are discriminated, you don't have the possibility to defend yourself. Sometimes I spoke in French - my mother tongue - but that always frustrated me so much. During all the years I studied, I regretted that I couldn't have proper access to my fellow German students. As migrants, we tried to get along with each other, and that wasn't easy either. Finding an internship was difficult. I don't know what the reason was. Racism, or my knowledge of German, which wasn't that good at the time. But there were so many hurdles that weighed me down. I was confused. I also thought about going home and stopping everything because it was too much for me. It was a process of looking at where my home is, is it here in Bremen or in Cameroon in Douala, where I grew up?

Building bridges:

This is a long process. It doesn't happen overnight, especially for me motherhood made a big difference. When my son was in child care, he came and said: "People always ask where I come from and I say: I come from Germany. Many say: "No!" and then I tell them: "I came out of mum here." That's how he always explained it. I came out of my mum in Germany. That clicked with me. That is, for my children, Germany was their home. My son knew nothing else, he didn't choose it either. I decided to come here through my migration, and my children were born here. And from then on I tried to build a bridge. Between this country where I live now and my country of origin. You can't say where I come from is bad, where I am now is bad. You have to try to do the best of both sides and build a bridge. I take from all these cultural encounters what is good for me to find a centre, to come to terms with myself. That's where I've worked on a lot, so that I can go through life confidently here and now.

Qualities:

I am very open. I like to approach people. I also have a very large network of people I know. I think I also got a lot of strength from that. I realise everyone has a lot to fight for in life and should try to get assertiveness. You should not give up, you should work on it and also be patient. That is also very important. I think those are qualities that have helped me.

Networks:

I have a hobby: braiding hair. I've done it since I was 12 years old, and I'll do it all my life. It's a kind of therapy. We African women often spend hours braiding hair. We also support each other and don't just do the hair. This is how many contacts with different people have developed over the years.

I also get involved a lot in school-related things. Through the children, I have access to other parents. Through school and extracurricular activities, you have the opportunity to get in touch with other people. That's very important for me, that you try to network, to meet people, no matter where. There are so many ways to meet in Germany: through different associations, or in person; and I think you just have to be willing to open yourself up to new things.

I experienced in Germany what it means to be a single parent. You can only do it through a network of people and it also takes time to build a network, and you should allow yourself the time.

Tips:

I tell all newcomers: Learn German, try to speak German. That is, one should simply dare. And no matter how I speak, the language is the most important thing. When you go somewhere, you have to dare. I know a friend who was ashamed to speak German because she was afraid of making mistakes. I am saying: nobody is perfect. I can only learn by making mistakes. And I think the Germans you meet also understand that; they give you courage when they notice that someone is trying to learn a language, to accept the challenge. Then you get the courage to go on. That's my first advice: learn the language first, and be open.

Get help when you can't anymore. Talk to people about your problems, then you will find someone who will give you good advice, even if some people make fun of your situation. Also listen to yourself. Look for solutions and be able to accept them. Don't always modestly say: no, no I don't need. You should also be able to accept help when you can't do it anymore. You can't do so much on your own, only with help from other people.

Role models:

My grandmother was a great role model for me. She was a widow and raised her four children alone in the 70s. She didn't go to school. She didn't know French. But she went to the fields every morning, worked hard to raise her four children. For me, she is my great role model.

I also met people at school and in Germany who I saw as role models. I can't say one person. I can find something in all of them that can help me. There are also many role models in our network whom I have met. People who have also achieved a lot professionally.

Future:

I am the first generation here in Germany as a migrant. We do this work so that the second generation, our children, don't have it as hard as we did. So that we clear the path for them a bit, especially for the girls. That would be the best thing for me in the future. That is what I would like to work on, that more women go through life more self-confidently, that they dare, no matter at what age they are, to do an education, retraining, etc., so that they can also go their way professionally. Only in this way do we, as African women, have the opportunity to lead an independent, self-confident life here in Germany. And Germany offers us so many opportunities.



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