



ANNUAL REPORT

2023





Message from ED

Dear Friends,

I am excited to share our 2023 Annual Report highlighting another remarkable year of elevating youth voice, agency and creative expression through the transformative power of alternative education, literature and creative arts.

2022 marked a slow, nonetheless important year that reignited our commitment to youth development in Africa. New milestones demonstrate deepening commitment to our mission amidst unpredictable terrain. None of this progress would be possible without the passion of our team, dedication of partners, trust of communities we serve and support from you - our backup squad making the work happen.

As we gear up for more ambitious efforts in 2024, I want to express profound gratitude for walking alongside us down paths less traveled in pursuit of equity.

Through the stories, photos and data these pages contain, I hope you capture glimpses of the hope ignited when young people marginalized by society are offered inclusive platforms to learn, express, connect and lead. Witnessing that spark firsthand motivates me daily.

The road ahead may be difficult but above all - the energy of youth rising together to forge the world they deserve is inspirational and at COAL, we stand committed to nurturing that resilient hope against all odds through education, books, creativity and compassion.

With you behind us, we have only just begun to illuminate lasting change. Here's to dreaming bigger toward future horizons brightened by empowered young changemakers carrying the torch.

Thank you!

Patience Finye Oyekeye
Executive Director

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About Us

The Custodians of African Literature (COAL) believes in education, the power of books and creative self-expression to empower youths as change-makers uplifting their communities. As an independent nonprofit, we work to elevate literacy and amplify youth voice and agency in advancing youth-led solutions to inequality.



Vision

A thriving Africa where every child and youth has unfettered access to quality education and essential skills to lead impactful and fulfilling lives.

Mission

To bridge inequality gaps through alternative education and the amplification of youth voice and agency in Africa.

COAL IN 2023

thanks to you

42,488

youth reached on
social media

56

Youth engaged in
open mic events

33

New African titles
added to our
bookstore

2

Creative events
curated

37

Budding creatives
supported with a
platform



Our signature Open Mic event series provided hands-on public speaking, performance poetry and creative development opportunities for 56 youth. 61% of showcase participants identified as male and 39% as female, signalling room for improved inclusion for young female creatives. We intend to address any barriers to equitable creative participation through targeted outreach and partnerships in 2024 given our mandate to elevate opportunities for girls and young women.

Advocacy efforts are set to bolster foundational literacy efforts in two public schools in Jos north of Plateau state Nigeria reaching 3,00 students combined. Leadership signalled willingness for collaborative efforts that will continue in 2024 to enable wider educational impact in literacy and numeracy.

Our social media initiatives and campaigns expanded reach significantly - garnering 42,488 impressions including proactive engagement among youth and stakeholders.

Operational pillars equally gained momentum. We expanded our bookstore inventory with an additional 33 contemporary African literature titles across genres accessible to our readers. Sales supported five emerging authors through literary proceeds. A streamlined online platform was developed supporting authors through expanded visibility and market access for their works.



I had a wonderful time in a room full of brilliant minds discussing student loans in Nigeria's educational system. We explored the positives, negatives, and everything in between. It was a great experience.”

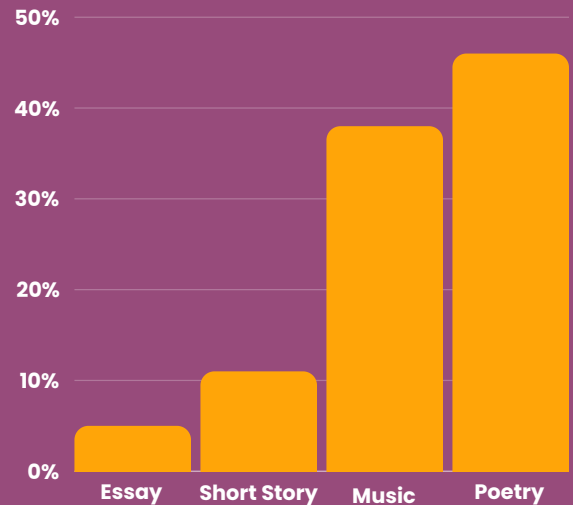
ELEVATING YOUTH VOICE THROUGH CREATIVE ENGAGEMENT

A cornerstone of COAL's approach involves establishing inclusive platforms for youth, especially from marginalized communities, to develop creative talents and sharpen multilayered skills over a sustained journey. Rather than one-off workshops, events provide springboards that participants can leverage to spearhead change.

Qualitative feedback from 15 youth underscored the open mic series as a **“safe ground”** to bolster creative confidence through public speaking and performance capabilities reinforced by structured feedback loops. Audience critiques coupled with applause drove meaningful improvement grounded in community voice. Equally, integrating issue explorations like dialogues on pressing education barriers enabled holistic learning melding inspiration, critical thinking and purpose.

Importantly responses pointed to activities catalyzing ongoing engagement beyond single interactions. As one reflected, **“This is not the first time I am performing on this stage and each time I perform I get new understanding and meaning to my work.”** This emphasis on sustaining chapter-based creative growth clearly resonates. Participants also predict sessions can elevate public discourse on youth-centered issues overtime given hunger for extended issue-based dialogue.

Through interweaving skill-building, expression and community action, initiatives strengthened youth agency to drive change. Or as one summarized, COAL improved their **“opportunity to lend my voice to help someone improve”** signaling the ripple effects of voice amplification. We embrace this mandate to nourish youth ownership across programming based on the promise within.



In 2023, we supported youth in various artistic pursuits, with 5% of them excelling as essayists, 11% showcasing their talent as short story writers, 38% contributing to the creative landscape as musicians, and a significant 48% expressing their artistic prowess through poetry.

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It was truly beautiful to have the opportunity to share artistic fragments of myself with people and to also share in their experiences too.



MARKET ACCESS FOR CREATIVES

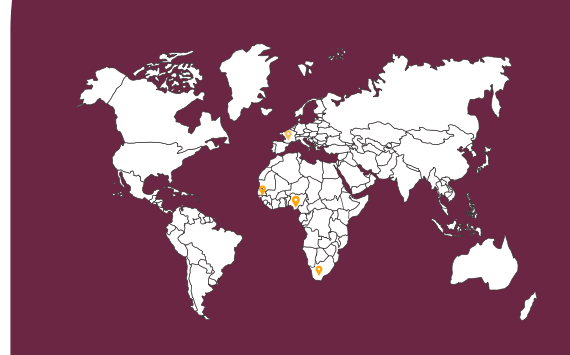
Making African Literature accessible and affordable lies at the heart of our mission to nurture creativity, identity and critical consciousness. Our commitment to elevating African authors enables us to deliver on this goal while reinforcing their market access.

2023 marked tremendous momentum for diversifying our curated [online bookstore showcasing contemporary fiction and non-fiction writers](#) shaping the continent's literary landscape. We added 33 new novels, anthologies and memoirs from authors in **Nigeria, South Africa, France, and Senegal** - spanning genres from Afrofuturism and sci-fi to cultural explorations around identity. Proceeds contribute directly to youth literacy initiatives in low-income communities.

Our standout super reader in 2023 was Bashir Abubakar whose prolific book purchases led him to state, **“Such a Beautiful Thing to Behold is one of my great reads this year. Thanks to COAL for their service...”**

Stories like Bashir's personify our vision for nurturing a lifelong appreciation for the richness of creative writing across the continent.

We thank every reader playing a part in our literacy movement as each book purchase goes to support children and youth in low-income communities with literacy and educational materials for learning. After all, books spread dreams that inspire young people to pen their own futures.





INSTITUTIONAL AND OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHT

In 2023, our leadership initiated a transformative journey, dedicating extensive efforts to develop a visionary **2-year strategic plan (2024-2025)**. Grounded in a strong belief in robust systems and resilient institutional models, guided by accountability and impact, this belief propelled our new strategic shift, emblematic of our commitment to excellence.

Explore the rationale behind our choices and the anticipated outcomes shaping our institutional trajectory in our comprehensive report. Delve into the transformative venture and its far-reaching implications for our institution and the communities we serve in our strategy.

Staff Highlight: COAL saw operational growth with two new additional staff who joined us in 2023 to support our programmatic initiatives.



Strategic Plan

2024-2025





I Like the feedback of the open mic and the idea because it is a safe place for me and I am not scared anymore of what I want to do.”

IMPACT STORIES

Unveiling Emotions: Vigil Caleb Shadrach's Journey from Silence to the Spotlight

For Vigil Caleb Shadrach, the journey began with childhood tales that jumped from the pages of beloved pop-up books. These wondrous stories her dad brought home sparked an insatiable appetite for literature and creativity. In time, Vigil went from avid young reader to aspiring writer, filling journal upon journal with poems that helped give shape to her complex internal landscape. Yet this budding 22-year-old poet, now a criminology student at the University of Jos, initially kept her writings private behind the closed covers of her notebooks. Like an unfinished painting hidden from view, Vigil felt her works-in-progress were not ready for public eyes. **"I wanted to make it all perfect,"** she explains, **"not realizing that it might never be."**

Realizing the imperfection of perfection, Vigil embraced vulnerability and began sharing snippets of her writings on social media in 2023 through videos. Motivated by a desire to give voice to those struggling to articulate their emotions, she embarked on a mission to aid others in their healing journey. Reflecting on this shift, Vigil expressed, "I wanted to speak for people who couldn't put their emotions into words and to help them in their healing process."

In a brave move, Vigil decided to transcend the digital space and share her poetry with a live audience.



Vigil Caleb performing for the first time at COAL's Open Mic

"I wanted to speak for
people who couldn't put
their emotions into words
and to help them in their
healing process."



In November 2023, she participated in COAL's Open Mic, overcoming nervousness and for the first time ever, she shared her work before a live audience embracing the support of a welcoming community. Describing the experience, Vigil emphasized, **"COAL Open Mic was a lot of things, but freeing was the prominent feeling."**

What made the COAL community special for Vigil was its inherent beauty and the sense of safety it provided. Post-performance, the feedback she received was not tainted by negativity but rather rooted in genuine encouragement for improvement. Vigil noted, "The community is beautiful, and it's a safe space because, after the performance, the input given comes from a pure place – not from a place of hate, but to see you do better. And this was the biggest thing for me."

This transformative journey has instilled in Vigil a newfound courage to share her authentic self. The experience has not only made her more willing to put herself out there but has also opened her heart to learning from the diverse perspectives of others. **"the open mic has given me much courage to want to put myself out there and made me more open to learn from others"** For Vigil Caleb Shadrach, COAL's Open Mic has been a catalyst for personal mastery and artistic growth, inspiring her to embrace her voice and contribute to the collective journey of human expression.

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"The community is beautiful, and it's a safe space because, after the performance, the input given comes from a pure place – not from a place of hate, but to see you do better. And this was the biggest thing for me."



You reposted

Umar Turaki @nenrota - Dec 30, 2023

Thank you so much to everyone who bought, read, discussed, and supported this book. Wow.



Farafina Books @farafinabooks - Dec 30, 2023

Congratulations to the authors of our Most Distributed Farafina Titles of the year 2023 🎉🎉



Daughters Who Walk This Path



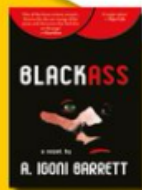
Such a Beautiful Thing to Behold ...

[Show more](#)



TOP THREE

Most Distributed Farafina Titles for 2023



www.farafinabooks.com



1



4



15



760



You reposted

Bashir Abubakar @Abubakarb330 - Dec 30, 2023

Replying to @nenrota

Such a Beautiful Thing to Behold is one of my great reads this year. Thanks to Coal for their service and can't wait to have your book chat in Jos.



1



2



4



76





Growth and Purpose: A Creative Journey Through Community

Solomon Eberechukwu's (BONAFIIDE) artistic journey intertwines with the story of COAL's Open Mics, forming a narrative arc of growth, community, and unexpected opportunities. As a student studying Computer Science at the Nigerian Open University, Solomon first took the Open Mic stage in 2019, recalling his performance then as **"messy, but I kept going."** This persistence marked a great step in his evolution as an artist.

When Solomon returned to the Open Mic stage in 2023, first in October and again in November, his growth was evident. He basked in the glow of appreciation from the audience, sharing that **"the feedback I received was really good, it felt really good."** More than just applause, Solomon cherished the constructive input, seeing COAL as not just a performance platform but a nurturing ground for continuous betterment. As he notes, **"It is also important getting constructive feedback to improve one's craft"**

Yet for Solomon, COAL impacted more than just his artistic skills. Its diversity sparked an invaluable connection when he met a stakeholder from Search for Common Ground, an international peacebuilding organization. This encounter bloomed into Solomon developing advocacy content on promoting tolerance and religious freedom in Nigeria.

From imperfect first steps to purposeful collaboration, Solomon's journey with COAL has been one of evolution, community and openings to make an impact. It epitomizes the transformative power such creative platforms can hold, where an artist's tale can intertwine with much larger stories.



Solomon performing at COAL's Open Mic

”
“...each time I perform I get
new understanding and
meaning to my work”



I really enjoyed my time there. If this continues, it will provide a platform for excellent creativity.”



NEW PARTNERSHIPS

COAL formed strategic partnerships with grassroots organizations in 2023 to further our mission. Local partners like Riegarsir Nigeria Limited expanded our efforts in institutional strengthening through COAL's consulting services.

Global partners like Elite Consulting in Estonia helped in bolstering our business development systems in best practices.

Creative partners like YomiBliss, Podbeta and Bamvi Jauro assist in capturing our mission's spirit through various mediums.

Research partners like Crest Research and Development Institute enable evidence-based enhancement of our programs. These diverse, mission-aligned partnerships strengthened COAL's efforts in continuing our work into 2024.

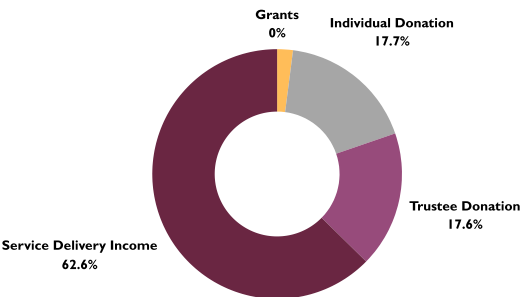




REVENUE AND EXPENSES

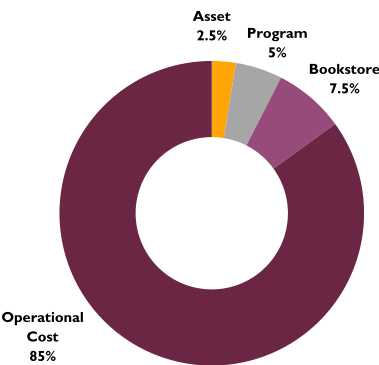
2023 Revenue

Grants	₦0
Bookstore	₦118,300
Individual Donation	₦1,025,000
Trustee Donation	₦1,021,618
Service Delivery Income	₦3,630,000
TOTAL	₦5,794,918



2023 Expenses

Assets	₦25,000
Program	₦49,000
Bookstore	₦74,050
Operational Cost	₦836,618
TOTAL	₦984,668



\$5,000

In 2023, our business development team successfully secured \$5,000 in institutional funding for consulting services, bolstering our efforts and enhancing our work.

2023 Board of Trustees

- Dr Charles Bassey-----Nigeria
- Patience Finye Oyekeye-----Nigeria
- Dolin Holt -----UK
- Alyssa Freda -----U.S
- Abubakar Adam Ibrahim-----Nigeria

LOOKING AHEAD

We look ahead with strategic plans to broaden our reach and deepen our impact and community ties through a refreshed **2-year strategy (2024-2025)**. Priority initiatives involve introducing our literacy curriculum to two public schools, allowing more children in marginalized communities to accelerate their learning and benefit from our educational resources.

Additionally, we will scale operations by launching a structured volunteer program. This creates learning opportunities for civic-minded youth passionate about community development. Through advanced training, we hope to nurture a new generation contributing their talents in solidarity with the young people we serve. Realizing such ambitious growth requires an expanding coalition of partnering donors, advocates and engaged citizens invested in our mission of advancing youth futures. We invite you to join COAL and the incredible young people we work with in co-authoring this next uplifting chapter.

By strengthening focus areas from education to community volunteering, COAL reaffirms that committed partners can drive systemic change. We leverage the power of education and creative arts as our vehicle. Thanks for accompanying us on this purposeful ride, we look forward to broadening our reach and impact and hope you will join us too.



CALL TO ACTION



JOIN

Embrace your role as a crucial part of the solution. Your involvement matters. Explore opportunities to become an integral member of our community striving for social change.



VOLUNTEER

Actively contribute to literacy and creative development by joining our volunteer program. Join the movement through [this link](#).



PARTNER

We thrive when working alongside partners who share our vision of a thriving community of unfettered access to opportunities. Extend invitations for collaborations, coalitions, and partnerships. Together, let's create a community where youth have the opportunities and resources to thrive.

DONATE



Support us in achieving our ambitious goals and addressing the pressing needs of our region. Invest in disrupting illiteracy by committing to building a more equitable future as we embark on our next century of impact. [Become a partner, donate to our cause by clicking here](#)

ADVOCACY



Join us in advocating for policy changes aligned with our mission. Participate in the policy campaigns we lead and amplify, or invite us to support and collaborate on your campaigns.

ACCOUNTABILITY



Be a critical voice in ensuring our effectiveness and efficiency while consistently centering equity. Provide feedback on what is working, suggest areas for improvement, and help us continually evolve in our pursuit of impactful goals. Your insights are invaluable to our journey.



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