



Interview with: Abigail (17)
Interviewed by: Temitope
Date of interview: 19 February 2017
Travel: Nigeria – Wales (UK) – Nigeria – South Africa

Temitope: My name is Temitope and today is 19 February. I will be conducting an oral history with one of the participants in the Migration and the Inclusive City Project. I will be recording the interview. Good evening, ma, and how are you doing today?

Abigail: I am fine.

Temitope: Can you tell us your name and your story?

Abigail: Okay. My name is Mrs Abigail. I am from Nigeria. I was born and brought up in the northern part of Nigeria.

Aaah... my experience as a child in Nigeria ... When I grew up, I knew things from left to right. I started in nursery school and then went to primary school and secondary school. From there I went to Polytechnic.

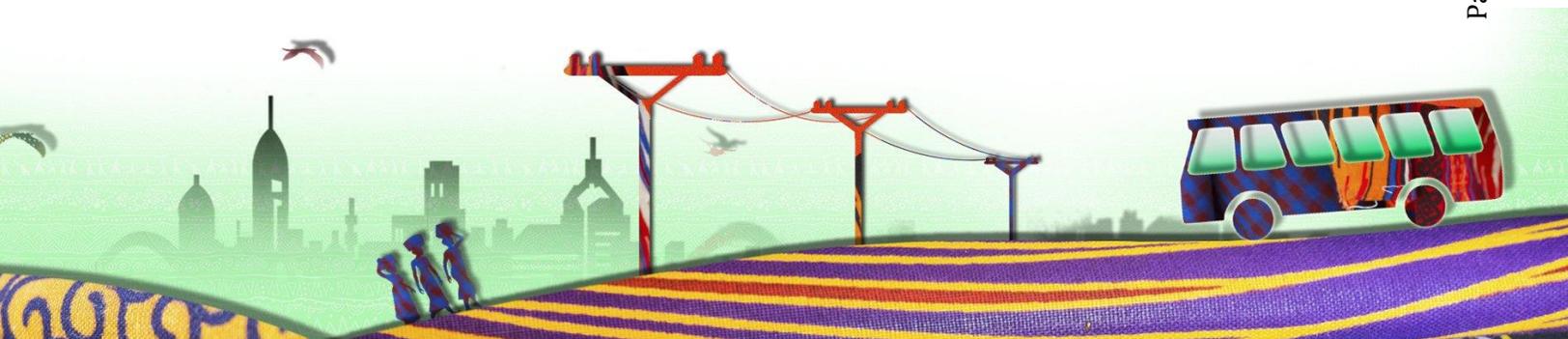
Then I got married to my husband, he is a Pastor. Together we joined a secondary school which was a Christian organisation. My husband was chaplain at the school which was located in Plateau State. For six years I worked as librarian in the school library. Later on [my husband] gained admission to the United Kingdom and he went there. It was nine months before we joined him and when we joined him there we were warmly received into the hands of the Welsh people. Welsh people are very, very warm. They welcomed us as Christians because we had come to be in the mission field there. They gave us hospitality and they sponsored my husband for a good five to six years. They fed us and provided for all our needs as missionaries. They rallied around us and gave us maximum support ... Aaah ...

I tried to study there, for example in learning computers. But as time was moving on, we had to return back to Nigeria. Back in Nigeria we started a new life. My husband was working there as a missionary too before he was appointed to head a church which he did for another six years. I was like an assistant to him. I was a housewife and I supported my husband in his ministry from time to time.

As for my life experiences, I noticed that things are sometimes up and sometimes down. You meet some people that are very kind in a way, and sometimes you meet people that are somehow ... So life changes.

In our culture we learn that that whoever comes your way, we accept them with wholeheartedness. We treat them well and in fact give preference to them over ourselves. We welcome them and make them feel at home. That's our culture as Nigerians. We make any visitor in our country feel at home. We don't mistreat them. We are not racist or anything. We look after them and make friends with them, and all those sorts of things.

When we came to South Africa ... to be honest, I thought that South Africa, being colonised by whites, will be the same as the United Kingdom. But when I came here, it was entirely different. Life was so difficult. When I first came here, I went along the road smiling at people, but I found everybody tying his face, going his way. People were really not friendly. I was wondering if things were very difficult. This was because there was nobody to tell you left or right. You are just on your own as you come to the country. Sometimes you pass by people and they will just make a sign: "Kwerekwere!" and all these kinds of a thing. We found it very, very difficult, but by the grace of God, we gradually, gradually,





gradually began to understand things. Now we have noticed that this is their culture, their way of life, and we take it as it comes.

As missionaries we have to be friendly with each and everyone. Wherever we go, whether we are welcome or not, we try to make friends with people and make sure they know we are all the same. As missionaries we go there to preach and for evangelism. We have to make friends with people. In my experience, when you are interacting with people sometimes they will listen to you and sometimes they don't listen to you.

When we first came here and asked people about ... a place you want to go, nobody will answer or tell you because they don't understand what you are saying. They think that you are different because you are probably a visitor or whatever.

But we have been here for seven years now. I give God all the glory that we have been here seven years and I have become used to most of the things here, and I feel at home now. I don't bother about anything. I go from place to place around KwaZulu-Natal, like Hammarsdale, and we are welcome there. We planted a church there and the people who are there are very warm and friendly. So we have tried to get used to them and the culture here. That is my experience in South Africa since we arrived.

Temitope: Thank you. You mentioned something about "kwerekwere". What is the meaning of that?

Abigail: Aaah ... that kwerekwere. If they call you 'kwerekwere' when you come there, it means you are a foreigner. It's difficult. If you speak, they pick up your accent which is different from their own and they say: this is 'kwerekwere'. So when they say 'kwerekwere', it means you are a foreigner and you feel rejected.

Temitope: So since you came and they called you a name like 'kwerekwere', how did you feel? Did you feel this was a form of discrimination? What was your experience then?

Abigail: I felt it as a form of discrimination. Really I felt intimidated because you are not free when you go. People are looking at you like this one is 'kwerekwere'. It's because the system now is new. Things are not balanced with their own way of life and culture and things.

Temitope: So how do you handle a situation where somebody calls you 'kwerekwere'?

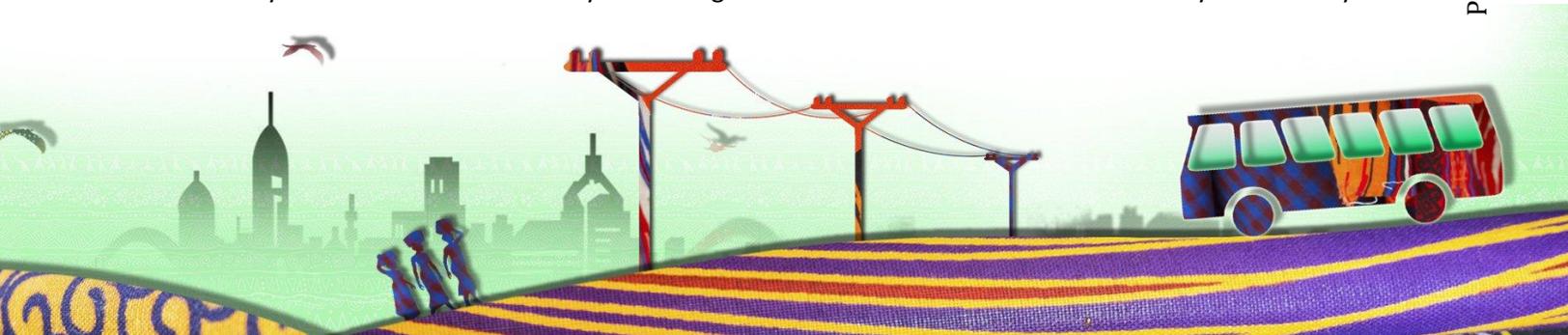
Abigail: Aaah ... when they call me 'kwerekwere' ... I learnt to handle it and I now feel comfortable. We all look the same. We are black. See, my skin and your skin are all the same. If you cut my hand and you cut your own, it is the same blood that will come. So you should know that we are all the same. There is no difference. That is that.

Temitope: You talked about co-pastoring a church with your husband. Where do the church members come from? How does it feel relating to and integrating with people?

Abigail: Yeah, relating with people was difficult, especially with the church we planted in Hammarsdale. It was a bit difficult because the language is difficult. It's different. Some know English and some don't. Some speak Zulu, some speak English. Well, we made a friend—one of the members from the Zululand church—and used him to interpret for those who don't know English. So that makes it a bit easier for us. But now most of the church members understand English because they have been here [for some time]. Even the Zulus among us understand English which makes it easier for us.

Temitope: I am still interested in the label 'kwerekwere'. When somebody calls you 'kwerekwere' do you feel secure in the environment? Do you find it difficult to move around or do you feel threatened? Can you share your experiences about security, about moving around and all that?

Abigail: It was very, very difficult. In my experience, this is a [correct observation]. Like I said, when they call you 'kwerekwere' it means you are singled out of thousands and thousands. They know that you





are not part of them. But, with the grace of God, we are moving in and out and, thank God, God has protected us up till now.

Temitope: So have you put any measures in place to make sure that you feel more comfortable in your environment? For example, when you go out, when you get into the taxi, where you live, do you feel secure when they call you 'kwerekwere'? How do you avoid things that come out like this?

Abigail: Well, when I go out—for example, when I go to the church in the taxi—I sometimes just keep quiet. I don't discuss anything with anybody because they don't know who is who. I will be quiet. I don't talk much because sometimes, if you talk English, the accent is there and they will know that you are not part of them. So I mind my own business and that is all.

Temitope: Can you share a little about your experience of being in Durban—your day-to-day experiences in Durban? How do you see it? How do you move around? How do you do business and all that?

Abigail: Yeah ... my day-to-day life in Durban ... Durban is a really nice place because if you are a very faithful and clean person you can move freely, do your things and do your business freely. You don't offend anybody. If you have something to sell you can do it freely. For example, I have a tuck shop and my customers come, buy and go, and I try to make friends with them. So I feel very comfortable now—moving in and out. Sometimes I go out and buy; sometimes I go and sell. I have [conducted] business perfectly because I don't step on anybody's toes. I move my way. I do my way perfectly. That is all.

Temitope: You said that if you don't know how to speak the Zulu language, at times the reaction of the locals might be different. Have you at any point in time witnessed this or have you personally witnessed a form of discrimination or attack on you or on anybody you know?

Abigail: Aaah ... [I will give you an example of discrimination]. Say, when I want to buy from Zulu man, I simply ask him how much? But he tells me he can't speak English and I tell him I can't speak Zulu. It's like he gets angry and doesn't want to sell to me. One man said to me if I cannot speak Zulu then forget it. He was angry because I wanted a sack of potatoes and I said: how much? He asked if I was English that I couldn't speak Zulu. He was mad.

Temitope: So how did you handle that?

Abigail: I just said: "Fine, if you cannot speak my language, you cannot speak my language. I can't speak your language. So that is the end of it."

Temitope: Let me just draw you back a bit. You said you got to this place about seven years ago. I'm not sure when, but there was conflict between the locals and some foreigners some years back. Were you in Durban? Can you share your experience of what happened?

Abigail: Yes, I was in Durban at the time it happened. Actually, it was not easy. But, for me, I used to get on a taxi and sometimes feel frightened. You don't know what will happen next. In some places, some people were hurt but I was not directly affected. Some people were beaten but not me directly. Yeah, it was very, very difficult—going out sometimes and you don't know what will happen. Sometimes you prefer to stay indoors, which was very difficult then.

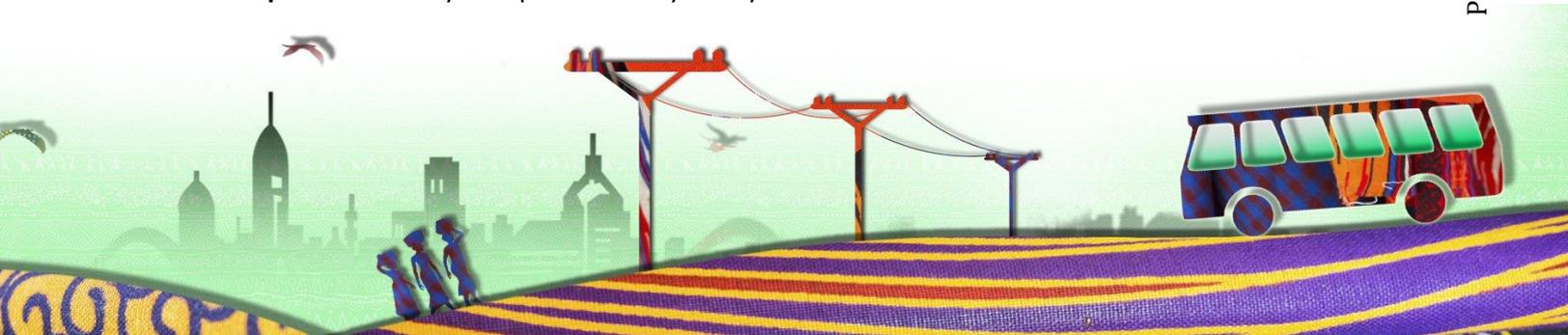
Temitope: So during that time, was there a point when you couldn't go out for some days? Or did you go out even though there was a kind of chaos then? Were you still able to go out to do your normal business, to go to church and everything?

Abigail: Not at all. There was a time where we stayed [inside] for up to a week. Even going to church at that particular time was a risk.

Temitope: So you stayed indoors for a week?

Abigail: Yeah, we stayed indoors mostly.

Temitope: So how did you cope? How did you buy food?





Abigail: Luckily enough, we had enough. Sometimes you buy food for a month and you manage. My children—the last born of the house—was going to school then. I thanked God that their school was just at the corner here. We would just drop him. The school made sure that every child was secure in the school. They would bring him back from school. But, for us it was difficult.

Temitope: We don't want to bad-mouth South Africa or Durban with negative things, but what would you say are the good things about Durban, things that you have witnessed since you have been here?

Abigail: Yeah, for me the good thing about Durban, or South Africa generally, is that there is justice in South Africa. If you fight for your justice, you will find it easy, though you might be intimidated. But if you raise up your voice, if you speak out, you will find justice. That's the good thing about South Africa.

Temitope: Is that the only thing or are there other things one can learn from?

Abigail: Yeah, one learns in South Africa that if you are a hardworking person, you will really gain. There are some little courses like computers, panel-beating, and ... ummm ... charity organisations that you can learn from and make a skill out of it.

Temitope: And from your experience, what are the things that foreigners can learn? You have passed through South Africa. What advice can you give to other foreign nationals?

Abigail: I came as a missionary. My advice to any foreigner that comes to South Africa is that you concentrate on what you are here to do. If you want to learn, learn, and if it is work that you come to do, you concentrate on your work and that is it.

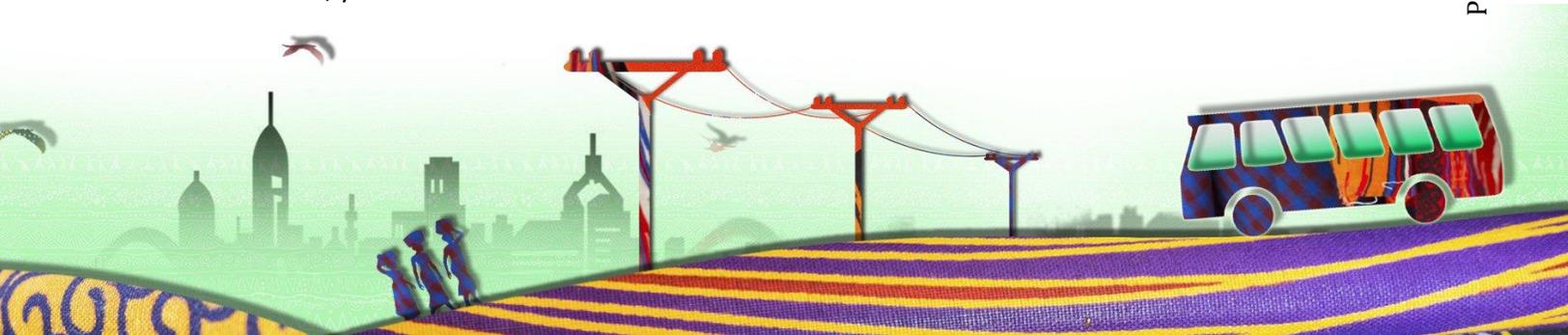
Temitope: I would like to probe your experience as a missionary. I know you are doing God's work and all that, but what is it like to work as a missionary in a place like South Africa?

Abigail: Aaaaah ... South Africa really is a mission field. The difficult part of it is that when you as a foreigner start your church, it takes a longer time for you to gain the hearts of the people. Why? Because of their past. Some people believe that foreigners just come to siphon off money and then go. They have a bad record in history. They say that some come in the name of the missionary and they siphon off money. This is what is affecting missionaries or churches today.

When we first came, it was not easy for us to start. We started quiet, sure, but it takes a long time. Today you get a member, tomorrow he goes and this one comes and then he goes. In South Africa generally, when you start a church they believe it is the church that will help the less privileged. They believe that church is supposed help them, but you as a foreigner have just started. Income might be low and you will not be able to support those that want your support. For that reason some will just flee. They say the church doesn't like them. I can tell you that we had two or three people with us, South Africans, who have left because they felt that they could not get support or money. We are just starting. We can't just say take this one or take that one. This is the difficult part of being a missionary in South Africa. To establish [the mission], it takes the grace of God. If you are truly a child of God and you are an honest child of God, you don't mix it with anything. It takes a time to establish the church and build the members up. It is difficult and you have to work hard.

Temitope: Thank you so much. If you compare some of these things in South Africa with what is happening in Nigeria, what are the similarities and differences? At home you are a local. In South Africa you are a foreigner.

Abigail: Hmmm ... being in Nigeria as a local national and being in South Africa as a foreigner? In Nigeria, as a local national, I can look for ways to feed myself, like trading. I can trade freely to feed myself. South Africa cannot be compared to Nigeria in terms of violence. Let me put it this way ... I feel that there are more opportunities in South Africa if you are a foreigner than are available in Nigeria for local nationals, you understand.





Temitope: You mean even though you are a foreigner in South Africa, you are a foreign national in South Africa, you believe that you have got more opportunities here than you would have in Nigeria? Is that what you are trying to say?

Abigail: Not as such. Having opportunities here can't be compared to Nigeria because Nigeria is where you are born and brought up. You know where to go and what to do. But here, if you come as a foreigner you just focus on what you are doing. In South Africa you don't have some opportunities as a foreigner. You don't have a grant and you can't take a loan if you don't have their ID. So you don't have the opportunity to do some things. That is the difference.

Temitope: And just to probe further, do you think that for foreign nationals some things are more difficult for you to get? Do you think if you are not a foreign national you are better off and your conditions are better?

Abigail: Yeah. Truly, if I am not a foreign national my conditions would definitely have been better. I will have assets. If I want to get a loan to do business, I would have access, but as a foreigner it is not possible.

Temitope: Have you tried getting a loan and it has not been possible?

Abigail: Yeah. I have tried. They said they don't give to foreigners.

Temitope: So that was the answer: that they don't give to foreigners?

Abigail: Yeah. They don't give to foreigners if you don't have ID. It's automatic. You know, we foreigners have passports and our ID number, but you must have their ID before they give you [a loan].

Temitope: How do you experience the South African environment as a whole? Is it a place where people tend to mix up, integrate and all that? We are not wanting to say this is wrong and that is wrong. We need to pick our learnings, find the one or two things that are right. Do you see it as a platform where people can interact and engage and are able to do one or two things together?

Abigail: Yeah. It is. South Africa is a place where you can make it if you are a hardworking person. If you focus your attention on what you are doing you are going to make it because the facilities there are. It just depends on the type of person you are.

Temitope: So, you are working as a missionary full time. How are you managing? I know blessings will come from God and all that, but in terms of finances, in terms of taking care of the children and all that, how are you coping?

Abigail: Aaah ... actually, to be honest with you, it's very difficult. It takes the grace of God as you have rightly said. Sometimes those that are sent by God and are full of God know that they are doing it for God. Some receive gifts from God. Truly, we depend on God. Whatever God gives us [we receive]. Actually, I do get support from my children at home if the need arises and we can't cope, but it is not easy. We just thank God. That is it.

Temitope: So, what are you doing to make conditions improve? Do you have things in place or do you have plans to make sure that things improve, may be one or two things?

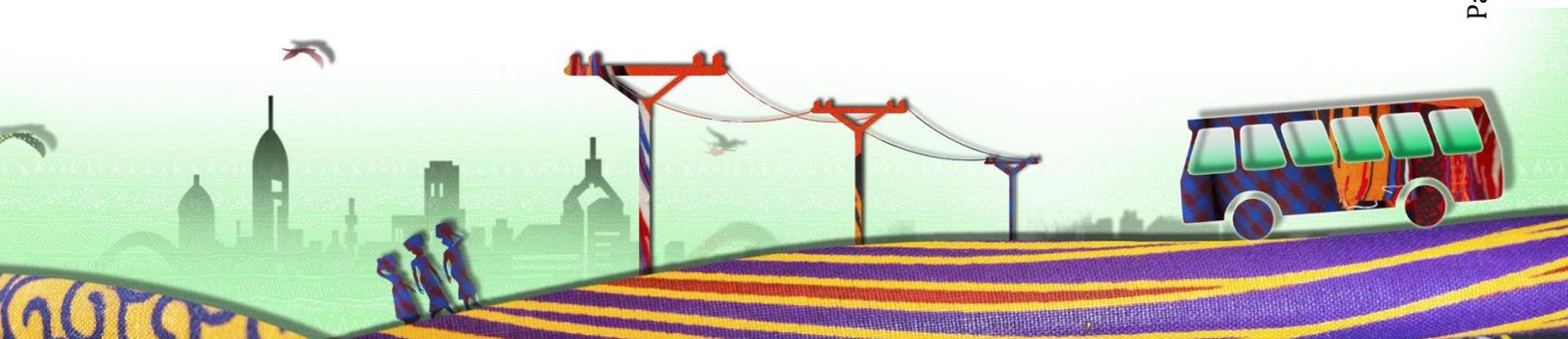
Abigail: Yeah, I have a plan to make things improve. I really want to get at least some skill to start a business so that I can support the ministry.

Temitope: So, have you started the process of the getting the business established?

Abigail: Yeah, I have started in a small way. I buy this African attire in Nigeria. Then they will send it to me and I will sell it. I go selling from place to place to get something to support the family.

Temitope: Do you sell to only Nigerians or to South Africans?

Abigail: No, I sell to everybody but mostly to the South Africans.





Temitope: And what has been the reaction of the people you are selling to when you bring something from Nigeria? It might not be something they know. What has been their reaction to it?

Abigail: Actually, most of my clients or customers appreciate these African attires. They appreciate them because most of the materials are quality. Some say they like the quality. So that has been my experience. They welcome it. They like the materials I am selling to them. Yeah.

Temitope: You mentioned that you came to Durban seven years ago. Did you come purposely for the missionary work, to do God's work, and not for anything else? Since you have been doing God's work, have you been seeing the evidence that God called you to come and work do his work?

Abigail: Definitely, a hundred percent.

Temitope: Thank you. I just want to thank you for your time for the interview. It has been good to speak with you and if there is any need for me to come back here I may come back to ask one or two things. As I said, once thank you and God bless you.

Abigail: You are welcome, thank you.

