

Ife Piankhi



Name:
Ife Piankhi

Position/occupation:
Co-ordinator-Linking Communities Project (Volunteer Centre Merton), facilitator, social entrepreneur and poet.

Residence:
Merton.

“Be interested in where you live.”

Sustainability has been central to Ife’s life. Her mother instilled in her a real appreciation of the natural world. A keen gardener and traveller, Ife was introduced to recycling, composting and re-use from an early age.

Ife has lived in London all her life and at 18 she started teaching in a supplementary school. Since then she has continued to work with young people as a teacher and facilitator to draw out the best in them, bolster their health and well-being and help them realise the potential in themselves. She also works as an artist, facilitator and poet and for the past eight years has been developing the concept of ‘Ancestral Gathering’ in London, working with groups to provide sacred spaces across the city and promoting an appreciation of the natural world.

“Sustainable development is about the way you live your life - you have the choice to be more aware about what you are consuming. People need to view themselves as part of a global community, and not just think that sustainability is about cutting back on things.”

Sustainability experience

Ife first became involved in sustainability through her interest in Ancestral Gathering. She realised her presumption that sustainability was a white, middle class pastime rang true. “I wanted to find out what this concept was all about and discovered that sustainable development was not viewed in its widest sense. The focus was on being environmentally friendly and lacked the essential social justice and equity

element. Diversity is how nature functions, yet people weren’t pushing themselves out to be more diverse. Equity and social justice are as integral to sustainable development as climate change and reducing waste.”

Ife currently works as the co-ordinator for the Linking Communities project in Merton where she helps young people to volunteer within their local community, not only to make them more employable but also to build greater cohesion within communities. She recently completed a pilot project funded by Lloyds of London run by Learning Through the Arts and Poets in the City on Climate Change in an east London primary school.

She has worked with the Findhorn Foundation on their EcoVillages programme and is a participant in the British Council UK Interaction Leadership Programme for community leaders. However, Ife’s career highlight so far has been travelling to Africa with the African Foundation for Development as a resource person for their Supporting Entrepreneurs and Enterprise Development project, to share her skills with female African traders helping them to improve the work they do.

Ife believes that society is becoming more fearful, and this stops people reaching out to the communities around them. “Sustainability is a long-term vision – it’s about people and how we want to live. In London, people feel they have so much to do and sometimes forget to think about what makes us happy.” As a mother of four, she believes parents can help their children understand and develop in society by understanding their own background first – “this will be vital for the future and just as important as their formal education”.

Getting people of different backgrounds and ethnicities to work in partnership for a common goal is one of the challenges Ife works to overcome on a daily basis. One of the biggest challenges Ife has faced in getting more people involved in sustainable development is to reach beyond their preconceptions of the concept.

“There is a perception that people have to have money to be sustainable, but for me its not just about farmers markets and recycling. For example, climate change is likely to affect those on low incomes first, so people will have to be more inventive with the resources they have and become more proactive in finding solutions. All the communities in London need to get beyond the ‘not relevant to me’ mentality and look outside what is happening in their own world - obviously this positive attitude will take time to build.”

The sustainability challenge

For Ife, sustainable development is about building relationships, social justice, caring for the environment and each other, creativity and living in the present. “Nature is all about structure and chaos - the immediate environment should be our focus. A sustainable future is the natural outcome of looking at the present. We are creating the future now.”

“Reducing consumerism is the biggest sustainability issue London, and every other major city faces. We need to live within our needs, be less greedy and change the way we feel so we can change the way we act.” Waste, affordable travel and equity of resources are the key things Ife believes London needs to address to become a truly sustainable city. This means developing fuel alternatives to reduce dependence on oil and sharing resources in a more co-operative way that reduces consumption.

Ife feels it is the diversity of London’s communities and the green spaces that make London a great city to live in, but London needs to improve access to the underground, reduce

traffic volumes and tackle its waste. She thinks London in 2050 may have bigger pockets of deprivation and the focus will shift more to local areas as our freedom of movement slows down. “We will be isolated if we are not connected with our local community.” The tip Ife would offer to those wanting to contribute to a more sustainable lifestyle is to get involved in your local community. “Be interested in where you live – volunteer.”