Mmekom Udosen develop inspirational workshops for girls in her mother's hometown in Nigeria. Image Credit: Jonathan Cohen.

Mmekom Udosen is empowering the next generation of strong women. Udosen spent her junior year planning her workshop, “We Are Iban Ifiok: Raising Queens of Tomorrow.” Iban ifiok means knowledgeable women in Ibibio, a language spoken in her mother’s hometown of Uyo, which is in Akwa Ibom, Nigeria.

“I could've called it ‘We are Knowledgeable Women,’” Udosen said. “But I wanted to infuse it with culture as well.”

Udosen, a senior double-majoring in Africana studies and integrative neuroscience, wanted to use the Harpur Fellows’ resources in a personal and meaningful way.

“I knew that I wanted to work with kids or my peers,” Udosen said. “And I noticed that I was really good at talking to girls and giving them advice.”

Once she narrowed down her audience to adolescent girls, Udosen decided to hold the workshop in Uyo, and began to draw inspiration from the strong women around her.

“My mom had to endure a lot and had to jump through a lot of hoops to get where she is now,” Udosen explained.
“Same thing with my mentors; they didn’t just get there like that,” Udosen said as she snapped her fingers. “They worked hard.”
And Udosen worked hard, too. She crafted her workshop carefully, ordering school supplies, sanitary products and souvenirs for the girls, all while reaching out to keynote speakers and panelists.
“I had to make sure that what I was doing also made sense to them, because I was born and raised [in the United States],” she said. “I didn’t want it to seem like I was the American coming in and telling them what to do. I’m not trying to take away from their sense of identity.”
In an effort to make her workshop inclusive, Udosen reached out to other women for their advice.
“I created a Google form for anybody who was interested and they each wrote a message on what it means to be a knowledgeable woman,” Udosen said. “I put a message in each gift bag for the girls.”
After putting in months of hard work, Udosen finally got to share her workshop with 75 girls.
“It gave them insight into what tomorrow could be, and what they need to do in order to get there,” she said. “It’s hard being a student and trying to achieve your goals, but if you don’t have the resources, or the faith in yourself, it’s even harder.”
Udosen, who was raised in Queens, N.Y., is proud to be a Nigerian New Yorker.
“I’ve had my culture instilled in me since day one, and I’m glad I get to bring that to the borough,” she said. “Being Nigerian has a lot to do with what I believe, my work ethic and my desire to help people.”
Though she has already helped many people in her 21 years, Udosen is nowhere near finished. She plans to become a doctor after graduation.
For Udosen, being a doctor isn’t just about making money or collecting data: It’s about improving her community.
“I want to open up a free clinic for people in Akwa Ibom once I have the funds,” she said. With a long road both ahead and behind her, Udosen knows that she is already a powerful woman.
“Success isn’t just money,” she said. “It’s about how you feel when you wake up in the morning, how you make yourself feel better when you’re down.”
Although she’s still wrapping up her fourth year at Binghamton University, Udosen is already setting her next plans in motion.
“I’m not really sad to leave,” she said. “I’m ready to leave because I’ve been well-equipped.”
— JC
Posted in: In the World, Harpur