



## Dr. Gidraph Wairire

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Interviewer: Shilpi Gulati

Camera/Sound: Divya Cowasji

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Dr. Gidraph Wairire graduated from the Dept of Urban and Rural Community Development in 1992 and subsequently did his Ph.D. from Pune University in 1999. He currently teaches and consults in social work at the University of Nairobi.



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GW: My name is Gidraph Wairire. I am a Kenyan. I am happy to say I am a TISSian owing to the fact that I did my masters at Tata Institute of Social Sciences in the year 1990-92 and I was in the URCD department that is urban and rural community development . Immediately thereafter I went back to Nairobi where I come from...I am a Kenyan, where I got a job at the University of Nairobi where I have been training and teaching social work at the university level over all these many years. Also there I work as a consultant in social work related issues.

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That's about me. Perhaps also I would like to say is that in the year 1995 I came back to India after I got a scholarship which was to India. The scholarship was facilitated by the Kenyan Government together with the government of India. This enabled me to do a PhD at the University of Pune which I finished in the year 1999.

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Q: What brings you back this time to Tata Institute?

GW: Wonderful question. I would like say that after I finished my training in Social Work at the Tata Institute and I went back again, I became a social worker academic. I had to make some contributions with the Fraternity of social work educators in Africa. So I was elected as the Vice



President of the Association of Schools of Social Work in Africa which is an affiliated body of the International Association of the Schools of Social Work.

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The Association of Schools of Social Work in Africa (ASSWA) further elected me to become their regional representative for Africa in the International Association of Schools of Social Work. So IASSWA was having its Board of Directors meeting in my former school, my Alma Mater Tata Institute and I therefore happened to come to this board meeting.

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Along with this I came to attend the National Seminar for Social Work Education and Special Educators which was actually organized by Prof. Vimla Nadkarni. So it was for this reason that I happened to find myself back again at Tata Institute and I am happy to be here.

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Q: Gidraph could you share you experience at TISS in the two years that you spent here and how has that shaped your career in social work



GW: I'll try to be brief in this... in fact I can say that Tata Institute, to a very great extent, gave me an opportunity that I had never had in my life prior to that. An opportunity that constantly keeps on changing and impacting my life and by extension the lives of many other people. When I joined this Institution in the year 1990. It was immediately after the admissions were done, I had never lived in the hostel so I start from here.

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When I was doing my undergrad I was living in a room cooking by myself... doing everything. And then I was a bit apprehensive about how do I come here and stay with a community I was not very familiar with. I had not had any experience at all, about staying in the hostel. When you join Tata Institute of Social Sciences what do you find? You find people coming from all over India and this was something that was a nice experience. They come from North India, Calcutta, Western India, from South India...you name it. We joined hands here. I feel... we were two international students... one was doing Personnel Management and Industrial relations...apparently she was from Uganda and I was the only other person who was from Kenya.

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So starting from student life, it was something helped me to remember that you can easily blend with other culture...to help me to adjust very comfortably. And from these I was able to move on very well.

I came to like Indian food, Indian culture, student life you know it exactly... it's fun all through. Tata Institute is not a closed place. It a place where depending on how you take it, you can grow great heights. I made good friends with the students who helped me acclimatize to hostel life.

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Now coming in after that, the teachers the lecturers were wonderful people. I came across an environment where learning is not that official. You know you don't just meet your lecturer who doesn't want to spend time with you. He spends time with you, you talk, you interact, you have lab sessions... I remember this was something very significant. Particularly when I was travelling with my field work. Remember I am not Indian and I had to go there but my lecturers helped me with a facilitator to get that acquainted and this was something that was really wonderful.

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Then I came across the TISS community starting from the cook. I had to meet them all the time in the dining hall. I remember people like Dilip, Sanjay, and Mustafa all these people they were there. Many of them didn't speak English, I did not speak Marathi but then I was forced to learn



a little bit of Hindi...'Arre baba yeh kiya...acha hai.' all these made fun. Meaning that when I was homesick, thinking about home the fun that I was actually having here could compensate for it. And these would enable me to concentrate very well in my studies. Our library staff was very good. There was one old man called Shankar, I think most of these people have now retired. They were very wonderful.

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I would not to forget to mention that anytime when I needed external resources from these institutions...Anjali Monteiro... they would come in and they could help me... I can't remember the place but they facilitated me to go and get audio visual material which I could make use of... and you believe me... these would help some programmes in the agencies where I was doing my field and to me it was something very good because facilitated, they served us a link to other resources or other sources of resources. Let me put it that way... which I needed for my studies. And this is something that also enabled me to network and to grow as a professional and I felt very good and this was just one of the good experiences and I am happy to be back here.

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Q: You spoke about hostel life and you said that it was the first time you were a part of a hostel of a different community. Do you have any anecdotes, any stories, memories of what happened in the hostel?



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GW: The men's hostel. I remember the first time I came I was sharing a room in this hostel down here. I think it was the men's hostel 2. And I was sharing the room with a guy called Umakant Jadhav. Now here we are, we are sleeping, when I was asleep in the morning he would just play music early in the morning, 'Haal kaisa hai janab ka' something like that. That's one thing I remember, this guy used to love Hindi movies and I couldn't understand what they were and till the music went on, I picked up a few things ... and there this guy wakes up in the morning, he is exercising in the same room as I am sleeping. That was fun in the hostel. And of course you know someone else was going to the bathroom and his music used to always be playing. And this was something we used to have.

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And until then I had never been splashed with water by anybody in my life. I don't know how these guys got to know about my birthday and they said we have to celebrate your birthday so I said okay and after the cake they came and splashed water on me and it was just fun. We enjoyed ourselves. I think we had great fun. I remember these guys Ashim Chawla who later on married one lady called Malini. Umakant, my roommate married his classmate called Manisha and I am happy to know that the guys are doing very well. What I realized apart from building professional social work practitioners, professional social work educators, agents of change TISS also provided an opportunity where people could settle down in life and of course...



... Although that's not their primary function of the Institute then it was coming up...

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I saw it when I was there. I happened to pass through men's hostel I and guess what they were just dancing. And then there were sporting activities and I think this is something we need because we are still growing. We are still students. If we say we are going to remain just official official, and the youth that the students are at that point in time, I don't think that would be actually very good. So TISS is an Institution that provides an environment for holistic development of individuals particularly the youth because many of them who come to study are just youngsters and I'm happy to be associated with that.

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Q: You spoke about your field work, how was the experience of going into a community in India where language is a barrier in a completely new place. What were the challenges that you faced and how did you overcome them?

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First and foremost I think I was a little bit lucky in the sense that as I told you, I had done my BSW from India at the Osmania University in Hyderabad meaning that I had had at least an experience of working with local Indian communities. What I had learnt is working in urban communities in urban slums settings talk about Dharavi and all those places because I had to go there to some of the agencies... that I had lacked. Then talk about the experiences in the hustle and bustle in a city like Bombay that I had not experienced. But I can say that I was able to adjust and I think if one is positive you just maintain your focus and you can actually... and move on.

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So initially I had to do it with assistance from a few of my colleagues especially when I had to talk and interact because in Hyderabad it was not such of Hindi, it was Telugu. Here it was Hindi and Marathi, I never knew this... so they could really enable me and I think it was happening in the very first semester. We were having these orientations on the basics of the foundation courses in social work. Later on I was appointed to my field in an Institution or agency where I was working with children in need of special care and most of the people there were speaking in English and it was in a school setup so I didn't have a problem there.

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Finally I remember when I had to go to my rural camp in my second year masters in the last semester I chose to go to Madras. I said I wanted to go to a place I didn't know, another environment and I did my field work with the World Vision of India. I was able to get to interact with people from Chennai, in the neighborhood and in the communities over there and I learnt a lot. And I think it was an experience I can never forget.

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I took it positively. It has helped me to appreciate humankind. We could be different in our colour, in our cultural practices but it really depends on how you take it. They also appreciate you and it was fun and because of this we were able to move on. You will be surprised to find that after I came to Tata Institute I had to go back to Hyderabad and I stayed with a family because we had bonded so well by then. And it is something that still moves on today.

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Q: Is there any professor you remember?

GW: Quite a number. Where do I start? Anjali here. And Jayasankar. They took a course in communication and audio visual and they linked me up with other agencies ... was it called Avehi. They sent me there, they told me these were the people and I was constantly going to Avehi I still remember. And I'm very happy to see that now if I am here, I don't have to go to



Avehi everything is already here in surplus and in fact I am very happy and challenged... to see this is the kind of thing that is happening. I remember Prof. Parasuraman, he's now the Director and he taught us a course in population dynamics. Mr. Swapan Garain who taught a course in organizational behavior. He's still here. I remember Katy Gandevia in social work methods and remember she was cheerful lady.

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The former Director I remember. She taught me integrated social work practice. She also taught me I think that was the course she took me through... I also remember Mr. Hilarius Beck because ... but I think then he had just joined the university. But he did a lot. And probably I forgot to tell you. In 1997 I came back to Tata Institute...Now, you see my attachment with Tata Institute... I came back for a one semester course in post graduate research methodology. I came back for this because when I was doing my PhD, in Poona, I really struggled. When it came to research methodology I suffered and I told myself I have a place to hang on to... to go back to Tata Institute. So when I came I asked for Mr. R.D. Naik and I came to know that he has retired. Madam Gowri is there and I think there is also D P Singh. They did a lot in Statistics. TISS actually means a lot to me. You can see that. I had forgotten about my post graduate certificate in research methodology in 1997. It's wonderful to be back.

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Q: It's very nice to see how sharp you are with very your memory. Now that you are back to the Institute. It completed 75 years. Is there some message you would like to give to the Institute.

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GW: I think when Tata Institute is completing 75 years I am celebrating 45 years . So you can actually see that kind of situation. I would say that Tata Institute, keep up the good work. Tata Institute is a place where innovations are not hindered. It's not a place where those bureaucratic procedures that undermine academics to come up with academic programs are hindered. It's given people an opportunity to bring out their potentials and potentialities. For this reason, TISS keep up the good work. TISS you are not growing, you are now 75, I am sure you have immense wisdom not only in the great nation of India but also but different places, Kenya included, Africa included and by extension the world over. So cheers! Keep up the good work. Bravo TISS.