

# **FLORENCE (‘DJ CUPPY’) OTEDOLA AND SAVE THE CHILDREN: INCREASING IMPACT THROUGH PARTNERSHIP**

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## The Case Study

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*“Children are the future leaders, and I wanted to be part of an organisation who put them first. My passion and dedication to the Cuppy Foundation was inspired by my trip to Borno [Nigeria], where I visited the local stabilisation centre, and that’s when I truly knew children needed to be at the forefront of my philanthropy.”<sup>1</sup>*

Florence ‘Cuppy’ Otedola, Founder of The Cuppy Foundation, on her decision to partner with Save the Children, February 2021

## Introduction

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Fig. 1: DJ Cuppy performing at the 2021 Gold Dust Conference. Copyright Florence ‘DJ Cuppy’ Otedola.

After performing some of her most popular tracks, including ‘Gelato’, ‘Green Light’, and ‘Litty Lit & Jollof on the Jet’, DJ Cuppy experienced relief mixed with elation as she left the hundreds of virtual attendees at her 2021 Gold Dust Conference. Professionally known as DJ Cuppy, Florence ‘Cuppy’ Otedola is a Nigerian born DJ, artist, and music producer. Her Gold Dust Conference was livestreamed to a global audience and celebrated the achievements of her philanthropic organisation The Cuppy Foundation, which is building a reputation for improving education and child protection in Nigeria.

The virtual Conference followed Cuppy’s 2019 Gold Dust Gala, which took place in Abuja and highlighted the Foundation’s partnership with international charity Save the Children. The Gold Dust Gala was a triumph, raising millions of dollars and drawing vital attention to key causes, including from Nigerian President Buhari. Natasha Kaplinsky OBE, a Save the Children Ambassador who flew to Nigeria to attend the event was deeply impressed: “It was an incredible event, I’d never attended anything like it. Nigerian national television was shut down to broadcast

the Gala and Cuppy performed endlessly throughout. She has an enormous following and she's not afraid to use it— There was a huge amount of money raised.”

Given the success of the 2021 Conference coupled with the achievements of the Foundation over the past two years, Cuppy felt vindicated; the rising pop culture icon's collaboration with Save the Children had significantly broadened the scope of her philanthropic endeavours. Working with Save the Children was an ideal match given Cuppy's philanthropic priorities in Nigeria and Save the Children's long-running expertise in-country. Moreover, Save the Children enthusiastically welcomed the opportunity to work directly with a young African philanthropist with a passion for supporting Nigerian youth. Over the last several years, the partnership between the Cuppy Foundation and Save the Children had provided support to more than 9,100 people in Nigeria during a time of tremendous uncertainty.<sup>2</sup>

Save the Children, a prominent international non-governmental organisation (INGO), has an extensive local network and 60+ years of experience working and supporting children in Africa. The collaboration thus supplied both Cuppy and her Foundation with welcome expertise and guidance to create structured and focused systematic philanthropic impact. The global position of Save the Children also gives Cuppy an invaluable platform from which to represent Nigeria and advocate on behalf of the nation's children globally, but as a local voice. In addition to creating impact as a donor, Cuppy, an internationally recognised performing artist, injects new energy into Save the Children. With her enormous following social media following — which includes Twitter, Instagram and other digital platforms — Cuppy has amplified and raised awareness of Save the Children's achievements and initiatives, particularly as the charity marked its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2019.

Save the Children CEO Kevin Watkins' speech from the Conference resonated with Cuppy, particularly his comments on the key importance of local collaborations to achieve broader goals that support Nigerian children. Reflecting on the partnership, she reminded herself that the collaboration was a young and unconventional one. Despite early successes, the task of creating an enduring philanthropic partnership remained formidable, causing Cuppy to wonder about the potential challenges that might hinder the effectiveness and synergy of such a high-profile working relationship.

Inspired by the Conference, Cuppy's contemplation was well-timed, with the annual review meeting between her team and Save the Children due in a matter of weeks. Soon after the Conference, Cuppy sat down at her desk in London and proceeded to list salient features of the partnership that had clear mutual benefits. She had much to consider, given the unique nature of the collaboration. Areas Cuppy identified as being key to the advancement of the partnership included:

- 1) Leveraging the power of an INGO cooperation: Cuppy is the first individual to serve as a Save the Children donor, Ambassador, and Africa Advisory Board member. What type of platform does this unique triple role allow and how can it be leveraged to achieve both Cuppy's philanthropic goals and those of Save the Children?
- 2) Utilising her personal brand – with its associated social and cultural capital – to generate greater impact for the partnership: how could Cuppy use her voice to build more diverse, inclusive philanthropic partnerships in Africa?

- 3) Liaising with key stakeholders like the Nigerian government: which government offices and officials were key to the success of Save the Children's programmes and how could Cuppy position herself as an advocate at both local and national levels?

Inspired by the success of the Conference and all that the collaboration had accomplished over the past year, Cuppy turned on her laptop and began preparing a strategy document to be presented at the upcoming meeting.

## **Background: DJ Cuppy and The Cuppy Foundation**

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Fig 2. DJ Cuppy visiting the Nigerian State Government Youth Alliance. Copyright Florence 'DJ Cuppy' Otedola.

International DJ, philanthropist and activist, Cuppy, who was born Florence Ifeoluwa Otedola in 1992, grew up in Lagos, Nigeria. Moving to London at 13, Cuppy's parents gifted her with an iPod, which she filled with Nigerian music so she could always keep a part of home with her. In 2014, Cuppy graduated with a degree in business and economics from King's College London. She had already started DJing as a teenager and built a reputation as one of the foremost DJs in Africa when Cuppy was selected as a DJ at the MTV Africa Music Awards. In that same year, she was also appointed by Nigeria's Minister of Tourism, Culture and National Orientation (Edem Duke) as the tourism ambassador for the country's "Fascinating Nigeria" campaign. She went on to earn a Music Business master's degree from New York University while interning at Jay-Z's Roc Nation imprint in 2015.

Outside of music, Cuppy is a Global Citizen and Save the Children Ambassador, and the welfare of young people is close to her heart. She started The Cuppy Foundation in 2018, aimed at tackling issues surrounding child protection and education for girls and persons with disabilities. The Foundation was born out of Cuppy's deep passion for giving visibility and opportunity to individuals who have been forgotten and relegated to the background of society. The Foundation's Cuppy Gold Gala raised US \$17 million in recent years to help displaced children across Nigeria.

DJ Cuppy joined Save the Children as an ambassador in 2019, following her help in launching their Africa Advisory Board as a founding member. As someone who is vocal about the right for girls to have access to a quality education, Cuppy champions Save the Children's education programmes. As Cuppy notes: "Education – especially for girls – is key to improving their chances in life. I would not be the same person had it not been for the education I received, and I am keen to ensure that every last child has a chance to go to school and learn".

Cuppy is also actively involved in raising awareness and support for the work of Save The Children in Africa, regularly using her own social channels to highlight the work of Save the Children and show how others can get involved. She has helped Save the Children to host several fundraising events in Nigeria and the United Kingdom, and most recently worked with the organisation to attract several significant donations that are transforming the lives of millions of children. She is also an Ambassador for Lagos SDGs Youth Alliance. In 2020, Cuppy was inducted into Forbes Magazine's '30 under 30' class. In the following year, Cuppy enrolled at Oxford University for her second master's degree in African Studies.

## **Partnering with an INGO**

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Cuppy was first introduced to Save the Children by Dianna Melrose, the former British High Commissioner to Tanzania. A dedicated trustee of Save the Children UK, Dianna approached Cuppy after a chance encounter in Dar es Salaam during her "Cuppy Takes Africa" tour. She heard Cuppy giving an inspiring TV interview urging girls to be ambitious for themselves. After learning of Cuppy's interest in philanthropy, she asked if Cuppy would be interested in helping develop Save the Children's African philanthropy initiative. Following this invitation, Cuppy subsequently visited Save the Children's Lagos schools and stabilisation centres in Nigeria's north-eastern Maiduguri region to learn about the organisation's work. Cuppy was shocked by the scale of assistance needed and became increasingly determined to help improve local children's lives. Reflecting on what she had seen, Cuppy commented that "Education – especially for girls – is key to improving their chances in life. I would not be the same person had it not been for the education I received, and I am keen to ensure that every last child has a chance to go to school and learn".<sup>3</sup>

Save the Children was established in 1919 and has supported children around the world in reaching their full potential by providing health care, food, shelter, and education. In 2020, the organisation provided direct support to 44.9 million children and 38.3 million adults across 117 countries. Save the Children's work in Africa began in 1959. With a vision to ensure that "every last child grows up healthy, educated and protected by 2030", Save the Children mobilised their African philanthropy efforts in 2019 and established an Africa Advisory Board to increase their philanthropic outreach across the continent. By engaging with African philanthropists, the Africa Advisory Board brings Save the Children closer to its prospective supporters. In Nigeria specifically, Save the Children focuses on improving the nutrition and health of children and mothers, in addition to advocating and campaigning for key public health issues such as immunisation and breastfeeding. Given her championing of Save the Children's education programmes and her passion for providing quality education to girls across Nigeria, Cuppy became one of the founding members of the Africa Advisory Board and subsequently became an official Save the Children Ambassador. As such, Cuppy serves a crucial triple role for Save the Children as a donor, a Board member, and an Ambassador. Given her unique position within the organisation, Cuppy represents Save the Children's brand and advocates for their causes to her wide-reaching and increasingly youthful audience.



Fig 3. Cuppy during Save the Children's Christmas Jumper Day initiative. Copyright Florence 'DJ Cuppy' Otedola.

Through her Board and Ambassador roles, Cuppy must consider how to connect the organisation to prospective supporters and engage them meaningfully to generate greater and more sustainable impact. Having established the Cuppy Foundation, Cuppy's role as a Save the Children donor incurs a duty to hold the INGO accountable and make sure her donated funds are effectively utilised on the ground. As Cuppy commented:

*“On all fronts, representation has always been my main goal. My brand and the Save the Children brand are directly linked. There is also increased transparency because I am a Board member, along with accountability because I am a donor. I go to a Board meeting where we talk about strategic directions and getting more ambassadors to join our cause. Then I go to an Ambassador meeting, and I interact with fellow ambassadors for a promotional campaign. After that I go to donor meetings to discuss what Save the Children have been doing with the funds. I am constantly in different rooms, and I think this sort of multifaceted role was pretty much unheard of before I became involved.”*

Functioning as a donor and as a high-profile Ambassador further requires Cuppy to adopt different mindsets. Her combined role often involves complex internal and external interests, and finding the ideal balance can be challenging. Conversely, her multiple positions allow her to engage with the organisation at a deeper level and develop a multidimensional understanding about the inner workings of Save the Children. The numerous touch points through which Cuppy engages the organisation spring greater possibilities for future collaboration, and provide her with greater opportunities to engage with different audiences.

Moreover, the relationship between the Cuppy Foundation and Save the Children is an unconventional one where a local organisation donates to a large, historically established international charity to implement domestic programmes. When discussing their unusual but symbiotic partnership, both Cuppy and staff at Save the Children emphasize how essential it is for their teams to work collaboratively to decide the terms and scope of their joint work. At present, Save the Children's local deployment team in Nigeria implements programmes funded by the Cuppy Foundation, with oversight from both organisations. The teams further work together to manage finances, report regularly on the programmes and communicate results to a variety of

audiences. This singular collaboration works well— as a long-running organisation, Save the Children provides guidance on programme delivery and helps younger foundations like the Cuppy’s build capacity and key skills. It supports the Cuppy Foundation in scaling up and professionalising its operations. Save the Children’s experience working in Nigeria, with their existing networks and connections, also means they can implement programmes with greater efficiency. Two years into the partnership, the Cuppy Foundation has rapidly transformed from a personal passion project into a more strategic, impactful and organised philanthropic entity.

By partnering with Cuppy and her Foundation, Save the Children better engages with the local philanthropic and social ecosystems, creating a mutually beneficial strategic partnership that expands well beyond traditional relationships between charities and their donors. In addition, Save the Children’s international structuring determines that its Nigerian office can only fundraise up to a certain threshold amount for local projects. For larger programmes, local country offices depend on the likes of Save the Children UK to support their broader fundraising endeavours. As such, the Cuppy Foundation’s fundraising efforts on their behalf have been crucial in recent years. Noticeably, Cuppy’s 2019 Gold Dust Gala raised more than £8.9 million.<sup>4</sup> These funds were later used to support Save the Children’s multiple intervention programmes for marginalised children in north-eastern Nigeria.

While the partnership between Save the Children and the Cuppy Foundation has been a successful one, Cuppy recently reflected that there is still room for further growth and impact. For example, she noted that Save the Children requires increased communication between their UK office and country offices in Nigeria in order to ensure project coordination and improve resource wastage. In addition, Cuppy remains concerned about Save the Children’s administrative bureaucracy as she noted how many internal procedures can cause funding delays and high transaction costs, an unfortunate reality often attributed to the size of the INGO.

For Cuppy, if bureaucracy means that Save the Children cannot always move fast, then instead the organisation must “move smart”. To create greater impact and allow this important partnership to prosper in the longer term, Cuppy identified the key enabling factors that had brought the two organisations together and created this “marriage made in heaven”.

## **Branding for Collaboration: Digital Influence as a Tool for Impact**

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*“Cuppy is inspirational. She came from extraordinary privilege. I have been endlessly impressed by the power and her commitment to Save the Children— her ability to make things happen. What Cuppy brings to the table that cannot be bought is her reach, it’s extraordinary. Her social media campaigning and financial support are not simply about raising money but rather raising awareness. Save the Children is a very large organisation, and in just a short period Cuppy’s voice has become immensely valued.”*

Natasha Kaplinsky OBE, Save the Children Ambassador

With 4.4 million followers on Facebook, 8.5 million followers on Instagram, and 4 million followers on Twitter as of April 2022, Cuppy’s digital brand wields considerable influence in an era dominated by social media. Her online reach has expanded well beyond the entertainment world; be it football, cars or cosmetics, Cuppy’s virtual sway has enormous potential to raise public awareness of various trends and causes previously unknown to the public. Her digital presence constitutes an enormous opportunity to bring underrepresented social and philanthropic issues to new, younger and more diverse audiences. “I am not trying to fundraise at this point. I am trying to raise awareness and let people understand that philanthropy can be sexy and impactful”, Cuppy recently commented. The platform enabled through social media means the impact of

philanthropic work is amplified, which helps the Cuppy Foundation gain traction and increase visibility.

A strong and increasingly influential digital brand allows Cuppy to form interesting collaborations with other actors in philanthropic spaces. For Save the Children, Cuppy is the first African philanthropist with whom they have partnered, as part of the organisation's goal of changing the narrative around what types of supporters can create an impact on the African continent. As Chantal Uwizera, Save the Children's Head of African Philanthropy, noted, "Cuppy has shown that Global South donors can also be part of the solution, flows of money and aid do not need to come just from the Global North. Our partnership with Cuppy has opened up numerous doors for broader collaboration with African philanthropists." Cuppy's ever-growing brand and popularity particularly among younger people, especially millennials and the youth, further provides an opportunity for an older organisation like Save the Children to revitalise its branding and increase appeal among a new audience.

Speaking on the impact potential of someone with Cuppy's digital and social reach, Del Conboy, Senior Artists and Influencers Manager at Save the Children explained:

*"In the past there has been emphasis on working with the biggest names because they have the largest audience and reach, but less focus on 'why'. How are they going to connect with the causes they will be supporting? How do we generate an authentic message? This is where Cuppy is so interesting and exciting because of her background and influence among young people. She has opened up our work to a whole new audience. We need artists and influencers for their reach, but very rarely do they put themselves in the position that someone like Cuppy has."*

Celebrities and notable individuals regularly donate to a range of NGOs and charities. Save the Children staff reflected that it can be difficult to form a deeper connection with some of these very visible donors, as they can be reluctant to commit long-term support to one specific organisation. Creating lasting partnerships with a high-profile person also involves significant time and resources from both the organisation and the individual's team. Given these obstacles, Cuppy's steadfast commitment to Save the Children and to deepening the multiple layers of her partnership has generated a great deal of interest within the organisation.

Compared to committed high net-worth donors, millennials and the even younger Generation Z (Gen Z) are more likely to be 'drifting donors' who donate in response to the campaigns they see on social media.<sup>5</sup> Many of these younger donors cannot even remember the name of the charities to which they have recently donated. This is because younger people are often more interested in a specific cause, rather than an organisation. Furthermore, in an increasingly digitised era, the branding of charities is often not distinctive enough to make a lasting impression on younger donors. By engaging with Cuppy, Save the Children—a traditional philanthropic organisation with a century of history—can raise awareness and reach new and increasingly important donor demographics in an age of digital donations. Cuppy's social influence, interesting personal story and ongoing commitment to Save the Children can also help turn impulse donors into more engaged recurring givers.

Additionally, as a young, African woman in an arena still largely dominated by male voices from the Global North, Cuppy's partnership with Save the Children also serves to elevate her profile in philanthropic spaces that historically lack representation from the Global South. Save the Children has broadened the Cuppy Foundation's networks and provided her an important platform to meet with world leaders and fellow philanthropists at international events, including

those held at Davos and the United Nations. Together both Cuppy and Save the Children enhance each other's efforts and amplify local voices at the global level.

As Cuppy's online presence continues to grow, maintaining trust and building accountability will become increasingly important for her brand. Social media is increasingly a tool for achieving transparency towards both donors and beneficiaries. When speaking about building trust in philanthropy, Cuppy shared that she chose to collaborate with Save the Children because the organisation focuses on children and has a long and established history of working in Africa. Save the Children's mission is aligned with her personal vision for philanthropy, and she hopes that as a result of this partnership, more Nigerian girls will be inspired to become next generation leaders and go on to create greater social impact.

## **Cuppy and Save the Children: Working in Nigeria**

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When considering the long-term effectiveness of the partnership, both the Cuppy Foundation and Save the Children teams factor in the local operating environment in Nigeria. How, when, and to what extent organisations can operate in Nigeria differs greatly between regions, with both teams requiring embedded awareness of localized political, social and cultural norms. As staff at the Cuppy Foundation noted, any unfriendly policy changes or public funding cuts from the regional or national government could hinder the ability for programmes to move forward, limiting their impact and highlighting the need for foundations to work closely with local governments to develop fruitful relationships.

To this end, the Cuppy Foundation and Save the Children have recently been collaborating on a key Global Affairs Canada-funded programme which provides young adolescents access to reproductive health services in Northern Nigeria. Prior to the intervention, there had been limited primary reproductive health care services available in this region. However, large swathes of the local population were not aware that these facilities existed, and in some instances speaking publicly about them was considered taboo. Save the Children has been working closely in these areas to broaden local knowledge and awareness of healthcare facilities and has joined the initiative to provide training and coaching to local adolescents, with the broad aim of increasing reproductive health service use through behavioural change. While this joint programme is crucial to improving public health access in the region, the change in attitude and increased awareness cannot be achieved long-term without coordinated and systemic buy-in from local and regional governments. Hence, Save the Children and the Cuppy Foundation have worked to ensure local governments and religious leaders also endorse this initiative. Beyond local policymakers, the sustainability of any public intervention must include policy backing from the federal government. With this goal in mind, the two organisations work in partnership to secure commitment at all levels of Nigerian government.

Save the Children Nigeria and the Cuppy Foundation have also collaborated with the Nigerian government during the Covid-19 pandemic. During the initial crisis, the Cuppy Foundation provided funding to Save the Children Nigeria to procure and donate 50 million naira (approximately £89,000) worth of personal protective equipment (PPE) and infection control materials to response teams in Lagos State and the Federal Capital Territory. Babajide Sanwo-Olu, the Governor of Lagos State, commended this collaboration: "Indeed, your kind gesture is highly commendable and truly worthy of emulation by all as it underscores my sincere belief that –United we stand; divided we fall."<sup>6</sup>

Cuppy's philanthropic endeavours have caught the attention of many Nigerian officials, increasing their interest in working with her on local programmes. As Keith Kibirango, former

Head of African Philanthropy at Save the Children recalled, there have been times when local and regional politicians have insisted on meeting with Cuppy to discuss local needs in their constituencies. This demonstrates how Cuppy's elevated profile, particularly in her home country, places her in a powerful position to leverage social purpose commitments from politicians and administrators who historically may be slow to initiate education and public health programmes. Cuppy's influence and her connection to a large INGO like Save the Children mean that cooperating with the government requires a delicate balancing act. Save the Children must remain politically neutral to effectively carry out its work, most often refraining from criticising government officials. Cuppy, on the other hand, has at times spoken up in favour of stronger education interventions from the government and policymakers, particularly for girls. Her expansive digital, social, and increasingly political presence has transformed her into a powerful advocate, effectively creating an environment where it behoves local and national officials to be seen working towards the same causes.

To continue developing an effective and sustainable partnership with Save the Children, Cuppy and her Foundation must fully leverage the advantages of Nigerian networks, particularly as they relate to creating stronger collaborations with local governments. Most recently, the Cuppy Foundation has been working closely with the Lagos State Office on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and aims to develop deeper partnerships with national government bodies in the near future. Cuppy and her team members reflected that this process can be challenging because though they have a dynamic, high-profile presence at the helm, as a young foundation they occasionally lack sufficient technical expertise and specific knowledge of the varying political situations in different areas of Nigeria. Nwamaka Ifionu, Save the Children's Programme Operations Deputy Director shared that working in Nigeria requires constant adjustment of overarching 'national' programming to local contexts. For example, the needs in densely populated and highly commercialised Lagos State will differ greatly from those in the Borno State, which has suffered ongoing conflict and humanitarian crises due to the Boko Haram insurgency. Given the diversity of needs across such a large country, Cuppy's team must dedicate portions of their time and capacity to government relations to increase the Foundation's local presence and credibility.

## **Challenges**

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Back at her desk in London, Cuppy finished annotating her Foundation's strategy plan. She felt confident that by utilising and growing the partnership with Save the Children, her organisation could achieve greater impact. She envisaged that with the knowledge learned and connections made, one day soon the currently young Foundation could become a powerful presence in its own right, within Nigeria and internationally. She realised that the Foundation needed a more comprehensive partnership engagement plan with Save the Children moving forward. To broaden and improve areas for potential future collaboration, the Foundation must understand and tackle the following questions:

- What possible challenges might the Cuppy Foundation face in the future that hinder the effectiveness of the Save the Children partnership?
- What are the contributing and limiting factors to this partnership?

With her personal brand being a significant strength for generating impact, Cuppy knew she must consider utilising her profile to better amplify her foundation's work, and attract visibility and donors for Save the Children. As Cuppy developed the Foundation's strategy plan she also thought about the following angles:

- What branding strategy should Cuppy and Save the Children employ to increase awareness of their partnership?
- To what extent can Cuppy use her triple role with Save the Children, coupled with her high profile, to encourage other influential Africans to become more involved in philanthropic activities?
- How can Cuppy utilise her social influence and personal story to reach younger audiences and convert them into regular Save the Children donors?

Fundamentally, philanthropic impact could not be achieved in Nigeria without working with various levels of local and national government. Therefore, a comprehensive government engagement plan was also needed.

- How can the Cuppy Foundation develop a dedicated government relations team to increase its influence with Nigerian officials at local and national levels?

Cuppy looked over her newly finished document and felt that she was ready for the following week's meeting with Save the Children. There were questions to be answered and challenges to be tackled, but she was filled with optimism and a drive to further develop the Foundation, and this unique partnership.

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<sup>1</sup> Farooqi, M., 2021. Cuppy hosts the first gold dust CONFERENCE: Save the Children blog. Save the Children UK. Available at: <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/blogs/2021/dj-cuppy-ambassador-hosts-gold-dust-conference-nigeria> [Accessed August 7, 2021].

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> DJ Cuppy, 2021. DJ Cuppy – Celebrity Ambassador. Save the Children UK. Available at: <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/about-us/who-we-work-with/celebrity-supporters/dj-cuppy> [Accessed September 7, 2021].

<sup>4</sup> Forbes, 2020. Meet cuppy: DJ, entrepreneur & Philanthropist striving to help DRIVE africa forward. Business Quick Magazine. Available at: <https://bq-magazine.com/meet-cuppy-dj-entrepreneur-philanthropist-striving-to-help-drive-africa-forward/> [Accessed August 7, 2021].

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Cuppy Foundation, 2021. Annual report: Cuppy foundation. The Cuppy Foundation. Available at: <https://cuppyfoundation.org/annualreport/> [Accessed September 7, 2021].