

# Marc Gbaffou



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## Current position(s)

Chair: African Diaspora Forum (ADF)  
Chair: Ivorian Community in South Africa (CIAS)

## Bio details

**Born:** 1972 in Anno, Cote d'Ivoire  
**Family Status:** Married, 2 children  
**Lived in Yeoville:** 1999-2004  
**Current job:** Chemical engineer



## Vision

"We understand the realities of living together. We all agree that people have differences but we all know that at the end of the day the South African community and the migrant community share a common humanity. We share common concerns for our families, raising our kids in a safe environment, aspiring for better lives. We have to unite to achieve these dreams."

## Trade-offs

"When you choose a public life... the work is not paid, you often have to pull out money yourself to make it happen. It's a sacrifice. It is sometimes difficult for my family, my wife, but I met her while doing that and she knows it is part of who I am."

**"We like to work locally, with local communities, because violence always starts where local leaders are tempted by xenophobia to win over their constituencies. But we also need to work nationally, as many things cannot be solved locally."**

## Why Yeoville?

"The African Diaspora Forum is not created only for Yeoville or Johannesburg CBD... Even if we were born in Yeoville, and we used to meet in St Frances church, our first intervention was in Alexandra... We are active in several parts of Johannesburg and trying to reach townships as well as the inner city. But of course our main constituency is in the CBD, and in Yeoville in particular. That is where we have our offices, thanks to the support of the YBCDT."

"I consider myself a member of the Yeoville community, because I have been living in Yeoville for quite a while and also the type of work that I am doing currently in Yeoville... The Ivorian community has got two houses in Yeoville, it is home to me."

"I took part in the Yeoville Stakeholders Forum, where I was the Deputy Chair for 3 years. But then I opposed the former Yeoville councilor, as she made xenophobic statements in public, in May 2008... And one year later, she took revenge on fellow YSF members, so I withdrew from the YSF, to avoid putting them in a difficult position. And now, I was informed that I cannot be part of the Community Policing Forum, which is bad... You have to be a permanent resident or a South African citizen to be part of the CPF executive. If you are discriminating, how can you say you serve people, especially in Yeoville?"

## A key activity

The activity that is almost ADF trademark, is the work we have done in Alexandra in 2008, and then in Jeppes town in 2009, working with schools and making them adopt an African country, to open minds through education and culture. In Yeoville, for the moment we have not done that, due to lack of funding. But we have been focusing on awareness campaigns and cultural events. We have been co-leading, with YBCDT, the Yeoville Africa Week Festival in 2010 and 2011. In 2011, we organised a Pan African concert, around the theme "Migrant rights are Human rights", in the Yeoville Recreation Center. It brought different communities together. And beyond migrants' rights, some South African discovered that there are many rights they are not aware of. It was also wonderfully diverse African music, it was fun, in a very mixed crowd."



© Benit-Gbaffou 2008. March against xenophobia, starting from Hillbrow, where ADF was launched. Rayban Sengwayo and Marc Gbaffou, the two founders.

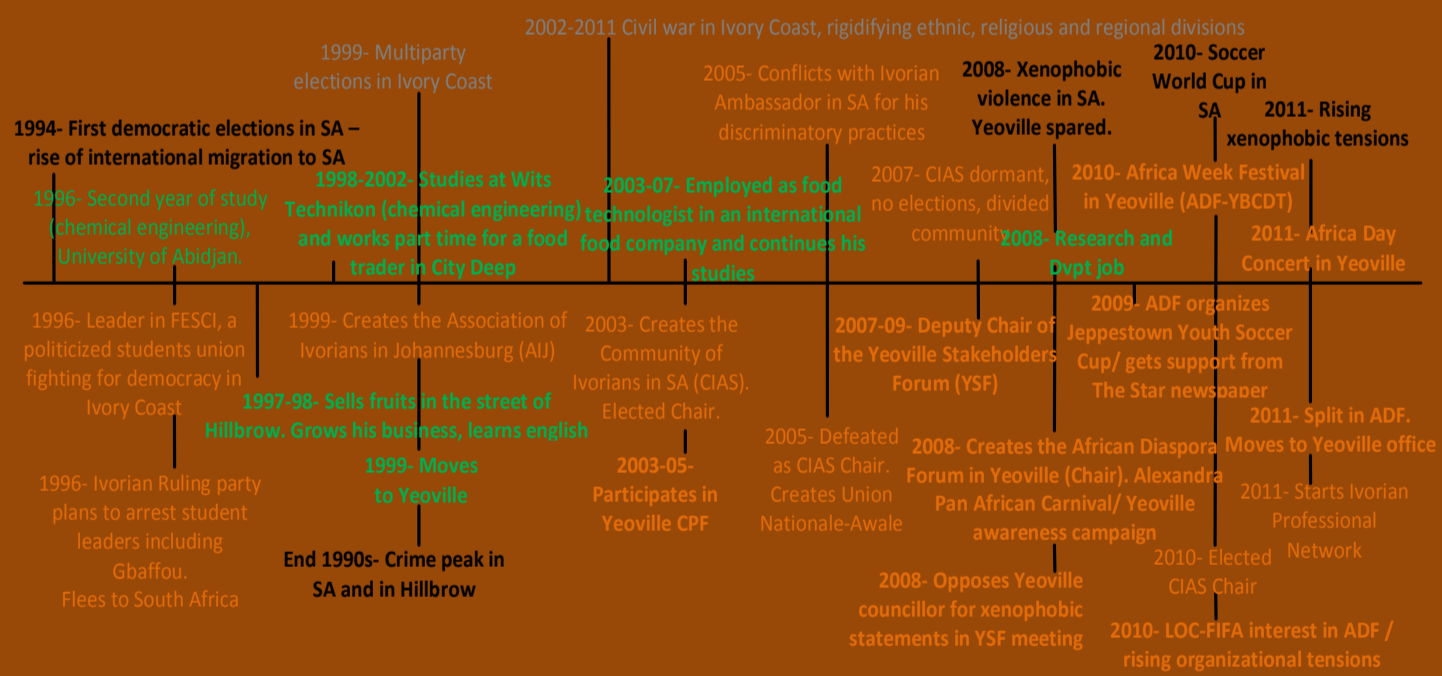
## Creating ADF

"Early 2008, we were thinking of launching a Migrants Committee, me and a Zimbabwean friend. Then in May 2008 xenophobic violence erupted. The ADF was created to be able to speak to government, as we realized that even two weeks after the attacks, the government didn't come out strongly to stop the violence. As the chairman of the Ivorian Community I had a big network of fellow community leaders, especially in West Africa and French-speaking Africa."



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## Marc's trajectory



## Issue of street trading

"You enter a city and you have to survive, you have to have an entry point, and for me selling on the streets was such an entry point. Sure, a country cannot allow people to sell anywhere, but we need to actually give the strength to people to organize so that they don't litter and they contribute to society."

When we came here in '97, all of the Ivorians were selling on the streets. Today some are lecturers at Universities, some are medical doctors, I'm an engineer... we are no longer in the street. You need to find a way to just help people to get that entry point. No one wants to stay on the streets, it's raining on you, you are facing the violence, the criminals... so you don't want to be on the street for sure but you are obliged because you have to survive. And that, I think our government doesn't get it."

## A few days week-ends in the life of Marc

Sat 24/09	Sun 25/09	Fri 07/10	Sat 08/10	Fri 14/10	Sat 15/10	Sat 22/10
Gave a speech on tolerance in Thembelihle, as part of Heritage Day Celebration (Thembelihle township) Chaired meeting with Ivorian professionals to strengthen Ivorian abroad political power (Melville restaurant)	Wrote minutes of the Ivorian meeting and proposal to the High commission for Ivorians Abroad	Chaired ADF executive meeting (Yeoville office)	Night at the Ivorian House – mourning and collecting funds for an Ivorian passed away (Gaba's restaurant, Yeoville)	Chaired ADF emergency meeting – what to do to respond to rising xenophobia in Alexandra? (Yeoville office)	Phone calls to Alex civil society and political leaders. Working with Secretary on press release (from home)	Chaired ADF general meeting (Yeoville office)