

As a young boy growing up in Senegal, Ogo Sow had one wish — to travel the world. He still remembers having vivid dreams of Paris's Eiffel Tower and New York City's skyline, but never imagined he would one day stand before them. Today, he has made those dreams a reality. Nearly every other week, the celebrated radio and broadcast personality — affectionately known as “Mr. Africa” — packs his bags for a trip to a different location around the world. Since becoming the first African immigrant to host his own American television and radio show in the mid-eighties, he has traveled around Europe, North America, the Middle East and 30 countries in his beloved Africa, spreading news and entertainment that has brought communities from around the world together. His community involvement, journalistic success and dedication to educating and empowering the African Diaspora has earned him the 2011 Community Leadership Award.

Ogo's first big trip outside of Senegal was in 1985 when he travelled to New York City. When he arrived, he said he was disheartened by the lack of community organizing and engagement among his fellow African immigrants. A cab driver at the time, he sought help from a Haitian community organizer who suggested he use the power of media to unite his people and offered him radio air time every Friday. He said his background in community leadership in Senegal, where he travelled to every corner of the country and educated agricultural workers for the government, made the experience seem natural.

Soon, his popularity and perspective attracted attention from tens of thousands of viewers and listeners around the globe who called for more of the type of content he was delivering — content that portrays the positive side of the African continent, something he said is often overshadowed by headlines emphasizing violence, hunger and poverty. By 1989, he was hosting both radio and television programs in New York, making him the first African to do so. For more than 20 years, his show “AfricVision” was broadcast on Channel 25, an educational, public access channel owned by the city of New York. Both his talk and radio shows featured prominent figures in African and immigrant activism, politics, entertainment and community building, which launched him into the position of a well-respected community leader. He said he was blessed to “link Africa and America through the airwaves.” In 2001, he founded the Ogosow Communication Network, a series of African radio shows broadcast for African Diasporas in New York, Philadelphia, Los Angeles and Atlanta, his current home.

Over the course of his two decades as a broadcast personality, “Mr. Africa” has developed a strong network and inspired the new generation of African media in the United States. In 2007, the network further expanded when he was asked to serve as a board member and advisor for the African Travel Association (ATA), an organization that promotes tourism in Africa. This position enables him to fulfill his childhood dream of travelling and his natural inclination to help others. In his work, he refers to Africa as a “university without walls” and calls travel his greatest teacher.

He said he was raised in a culture that gave him a “sharing heart” able to see past differences and love others as they are, something his audience has always respected. Ogo's motto is “each one teach one,” which he has taken on as his personal mission. He has done so by educating thousands on the history, resources and culture of Africa. In his personal life, he has also fulfilled this mission by passing on his love of radio broadcast to his nine year-old daughter, who often joins him for broadcasts in his home studio.

“Mr. Africa”'s desire to promote a positive image of Africa and act as a bridge between American and African cultures has earned him numerous media and community leadership awards, but he said this honor has a dear place in his heart.

“This award is different,” he said, about receiving the 2011 African Award for Community Leadership. “I have many awards, but this is at the very top because it was given to me by my own people. It's close to my heart. I'm so proud.”