

ANOTHER UGANDAN ADVENTURE

November 2010

**by
Michael Kirkpatrick**

Day 1

Monday, November 1

I'm now in Uganda. This is my seventh time to visit here since 1998. I traveled with Maurice Kirya. I got to meet his family last night and eat some of his mother's home cooking. Rice and beans. Matooke. Chipati. Good stuff. I got a good night's sleep. We are already running around the city today. I will follow Maurice around for the day to get a feel for his crazy life. He has band rehearsal soon. I'm looking forward to the creative experience. Maurice and his band leave for Chad on Wednesday to accept his Radio France International Discovery Prize award for Best New African Artist. He will also be the headliner for a huge celebration concert.

I feel like at home here. Waking up to the beautiful sunrise, the fresh air, and the sounds of people getting the day started was so satisfying. Life here exercises all of your senses. The sights. The sounds. The smells. I love it.

I have a lot planned for this trip. I'm really looking forward to spending time with Fred Mutebi and his children, Stephanie and Michael. Fred and his wife named their children after me and my beautiful wife Stephanie. It's an incredible honor. I can't wait to meet them for the first time.



Day 2

Tuesday, November 2

Let me get this out of the way first. To all of my American friends, today is election day. Please be sure to get out and vote. **Just do it.**

Yesterday was a great day here in Uganda. It was extremely beautiful. After having breakfast, I went to band rehearsal with Maurice. They have a studio where they jam. I have to give props to the band members. Roy "The Drum Machine", Sam on bass, and Nicholas who tickles the keyboard are in the band. I was blown away by the professionalism of these guys. I'm a witness to musical greatness. They produce sounds that are magical. Tonight they all leave for a huge concert in Chad.

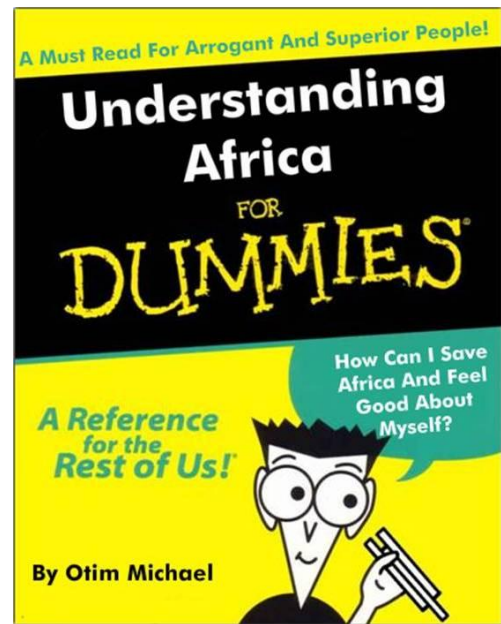
We went to a special restaurant in Kampala for lunch. The owner of Antonio's is a big fan of Maurice. There is a large poster of Maurice in the restaurant. People recognize him wherever he goes. He was approached in the restaurant and on the streets by fans. It's pretty cool to know a superstar like Maurice. He really is going to go places with his talents and personality. I encourage everyone to get on the Maurice train. His music is available on iTunes.

Ugandan Musician Maurice Kirya

<http://www.reverbnation.com/mauricekirya>

The best part of yesterday was spending the evening with Maurice's family. His mother fed me well. I talked with his father about important issues in Uganda. I especially enjoyed time with the children of his family. I loved hearing the laughter of Kirya and Aliyah. These two young ones are so curious and energetic. I performed my icebreaker illusions of the "separated thumb" and the "straw through the head". Even the adults got a good laugh from my performance. I got to hold the youngest of the family, Jacob. He's the son of Maurice's brother Elvis. Maurice comes from a very musical family. Two of his brothers, Alex and Elvis, are also professional musicians. They are respectively known as Saba Saba and Vamposs.

Last night I slept very well. There was a massive rain storm that happened during the night. The rain came down like waterfalls and there were constant flashes of lightning and the rumbling of thunder. It was actually quite soothing. It is those storms that make Uganda so lush and abundant. This morning the sun has appeared and the skies are blue. I get to spend another day being blessed by Africa.



Fictional book that should be written

"When the power of love overcomes the love of power there will be peace".

Go and make it a great day!

Day 3

Wednesday, November 3

This is my seventh visit to Uganda. I always experience something new each time. Last night I ate byenda. That's cow intestines. I think that it was a test to see if I would like it. Everyone gathered to see the muzungu eat it for the first time. It was rubbery like calamari and tasted like liver. I wasn't too thrilled to eat the digestive conduit for cow shit. I was a good boy and ate everything that was on my plate. It was so memorable that I will remember not to eat it again. I was contemplating eating a pile of dog crap to get the bad taste out of my mouth.

I am always amazed at the well-behaved children here. Aliyah is my new inspiration. She is a seven year old girl who was adopted by Maurice's family. Adoption here is not a legal term. It's simply the act of taking care of a child who has been abandoned. Aliyah was found as a baby in a garbage dump. I see how joyful she always acts. She also is a great help around the house. She does it to be an active member of the household. This morning I watched in humble wonder as she hand cleaned the tile floor, swept the yard of debris, and inspected the rice grain by grain while she helped prepare the evening meal. How many American children would voluntarily act like Aliyah?

Maurice left for his huge concert in Chad last night. I decided not to go. The concert will be on Saturday at the largest stadium in the capital city. It seats 30,000. I know Maurice and the band will impress everyone they meet. Get on the Maurice train!

I have now moved to my home in Uganda at Fred Mutebi's house. I got to see my "brother from another mother" for the first time since October 2008. It was so good to see him and his family. I finally got to meet his children, Stephanie and Michael. That's right! Fred and his wife named their children after me and my beautiful wife. It's an incredible honor. I hope that I can be a good example for my namesake as he grows up. I'm really looking forward to spending more time with them.

It's time for me to move on and continue to be blessed by Africa.



Michael & Stephanie Mutebi

Day 4

Thursday, November 4

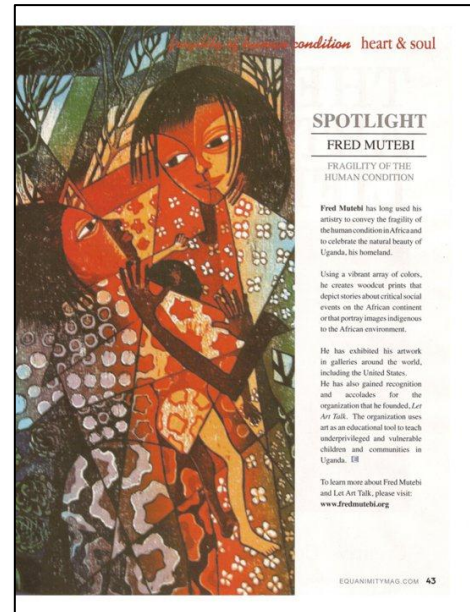
The **Kampala International Film Festival** is currently being held this week at the **National Theater of Uganda**. I decided to attend the event today. There are also informative workshops being conducted during the film festival. I attended one of them with **Fred Mutebi**. It was about the business of being a creative artist. Things like getting loans, financing, marketing, promotions, and partnerships were discussed. I had the opportunity to share with those in attendance my own experiences trying to promote **contemporary African art** in America. It has been very frustrating. There is a lot of ignorance in America regarding the amazing creativity in Africa today. Even prestigious museums and art galleries choose not to recognize contemporary African art. Most of them consider African artifacts like masks, carvings, baskets, and pottery as art. Those items have educational, historical, and cultural value. That's why I believe those artifacts belong in a natural history museum, not an art museum. I was able to make some new friends with my statements. I will continue to educate people in America about contemporary African art and promote the incredible creativity of my friends in Uganda.

While at the National Theater, I made a surprise visit to my friend **Sam Okello** who works there. He also is the founder of a wonderful school in northern Uganda called **Hope North**. Sam will be traveling to the United States for a couple weeks to meet with supporters, including actor Forest Whitaker and actress Susan Sarandon. Sam was in "The Last King of Scotland" with Forest Whitaker, which earned him the Academy Award for his stunning portrayal of Ugandan dictator Idi Amin. Sam also told me about his new performance group called **Mizizi Ensemble**.

A couple weeks ago, a British journalist who lives in Uganda contacted me out of the blue after reading some of my articles that have been published. He learned that I was going to be in Uganda and wanted to meet me to discuss some controversial issues. Today we met for lunch in downtown Kampala at an Indian restaurant. It was like a scene out of a movie. We talked for a couple hours over Indian food and some passion fruit juice. Then we parted ways. He will be writing an expose article that will be published with the information that we discussed. I dropped a few truth bombs that may shock some people.

The pursuit of truth and justice shouldn't be left to others.

I'm off to continue to be blessed by Africa.



Fred Mutebi in Equanimity magazine

Day 5

Friday, November 5

Today I decided to take a nice long walk from Fred's house to **Ndere Center**. It's a fantastic performing arts center that features the world-class Ndere Troupe. The grounds are gorgeous. It's a great place to relax and meditate. My friend Annette is the manager. I surprised her with my visit. She told me about a new monthly event that they will be hosting at Ndere Center called **World Music Night**. They gave me an invitation to the performance on Thursday evening. I'm planning to attend and also invite Maurice Kirya to join me.

Ndere Center
<http://www.ndere.com/>

The best part of my day was the walk back. I was almost at Fred's house when I heard my name being called. "Michael. Michael. Michael." I looked to the side and noticed a group of children playing. One of the children pointed at me and called "Michael. Michael. Michael." I immediately recognized the little girl. I couldn't believe that she had remembered me and my name from the last time that she saw me in December 2007. She was probably only about four years old at the time. Then another little girl recognized me. I was unexpectedly reunited with my little friends that lived in Fred's neighborhood. Their names are Cousera and Asmat. They even remembered the "separated thumb" and the "straw through the head" tricks that I did for them three years ago. They demanded that I perform them again. That's when all the children in the area came running. Suddenly I was surrounded by about two dozen children. They all watched in wide-eyed amazement as I performed my tricks. Then some of them ran-off to get the adults so I could show them too. I repeated my tricks several times for everyone. Then I took one of the elderly women aside and showed her how the tricks were really done. She smiled and laughed at me. It was a great moment. I'm sure I'll be spending a lot more time with the neighborhood children.

I love being blessed by Africa.



World Music Night at Ndere Center

Day 7

Sunday, November 7

Last night I attended the last night of the **Kampala International Film Festival**. I went there by myself but soon made some new friends. I had a great time talking with some young Ugandan musicians and creative artists for a couple hours. Then I was joined by my friends **Alex Kirya** and **Hamza Waiswa**. Alex is Maurice Kirya's older brother also known as Saba Saba and Krazy Native. He's an accomplished musician too. **Fred Mutebi** also decided to join us. We watched two fantastic short films. The winning film was a thought-provoking commentary on the destruction of the environment in Africa and the greed that prevents progress on the continent. The metaphor in the movie was deeply clever. There was a bonfire celebration outside the National Theater to close the film festival. Lots of people gathered around the bonfire to talk and watch the traditional dancers perform. Fred and I talked with one of the festival organizers, **Nuwa Wamala-Nnyanzi**. He is also a respected visual artist in Uganda who is older than me and Fred. The conversation around the bonfire was deep and philosophical. I really enjoyed being in the presence of people who are visionaries and creative artists to discuss issues that are important to Uganda.

Kampala International Film Festival

<http://www.amakula.com/>

I must have caught the attention of my new friend Nuwa Wamala-Nnyanzi during our bonfire conversation because he asked to meet with me today to talk some more. I visited him at his shop to discuss art and politics. I always enjoy listening to the wisdom of my African friends. He also treated me to lunch. We talked for about five hours. I learned a great deal about his life as an artist and I was able to share with him my efforts on behalf of Fred Mutebi and **Let Art Talk**. It was a very enlightening experience.



Nuwa Wamala-Nnyanzi

<http://www.nnyanziart.com/>

I've become an expert on the fine art of the bucket bath. I'm looking forward to my nightly cold-water cleansing and getting some rest. The first week has been great. I have three more weeks to go. I'm looking forward to the wonderful things that will happen.

There is a downside to my experiences here though. I miss my wife. Stephanie has been my greatest supporter and encouragement. Thank you Pooter. I love you!

Blessed by Africa

Day 8

Monday, November 8

Today I received a letter from one of the boys that I met in Fred's neighborhood in December 2007. He must have heard from some of the other children that I was in town again. For Christmas 2007, I bought a new soccer ball for the boys in the neighborhood and walked with them to the football pitch (soccer field) to watch them play. It was a great experience. Here is his letter to me:

Dear Michael,

I am writing this letter to congratulate you from your long holiday in USA. I hope your family was fine there and I am wishing the best in Uganda. We are breaking off at school on 25th/Nov/2010 and I will be happy to meet you because we have a lot to talk. Thanks for reading.

**Yours faithfully,
Moses**

It's great that he thinks my three year absence was because I was on vacation in America. His perspective makes Uganda my home. I'm also aware that many of these children are from Muslim families. Hopefully my interest in the lives of these children will bring mutual understanding between our faiths and our countries. I'm looking forward to seeing Moses so that I can listen to what he has to tell me.

Peace!



The boys with their new soccer ball

Day 11

Thursday, November 11

This week has been a new experience for me in Uganda. Maurice Kirya returned from Chad on Monday where he accepted his **Radio France International Discovery Prize** for Best New African Artist on November 6, 2010. Maurice and his band performed in the 30,000 seat national stadium for the President of Chad and the First Lady. The large crowd enjoyed a repertoire of songs from the "Misubbaawa" album including the extremely popular "Boda Boda". Since returning to Uganda, he has embarked on a media blitz that I have experienced with him. He has done several interviews with newspaper journalists, radio stations, and television shows. He also had an impromptu photo shoot with a German photographer. This award is a prestigious accomplishment. He is on his way to becoming an international superstar.

Ugandan Musician Maurice Kirya

<http://www.reverbnation.com/mauricekirya>

Maurice has asked me to manage his upcoming tour of Europe and Africa that is being organized by Radio France International and the French Cultural Ministry. I'm looking forward to the shows in Paris the most. That's when I'll get to have my wife join us in the "City of Lights". Paris is a special place for me and Stephanie because I proposed to her at the top of the Eiffel Tower in 1995. This will be our first time to return to Paris since then.

Maurice and I attended **World Music Night** at **Ndere Centre** tonight. One of the things that I enjoy when I am in Uganda is bringing my Ugandan friends together. I was able to introduce Maurice to my friend **Stephen Rwangyezi** who is the Director of Ndere Center and the founder of the world-class, award-winning Ndere Troupe. It turns out that Maurice and Stephen already knew each other from when they both acted in "**The Last King of Scotland**". Stephen had a major role in the film as Idi Amin's Finance Minister Jonah Wasswa. Forest Whitaker won the Academy Award for his portrayal of Idi Amin. Maurice played one of Amin's brutal bodyguards. Toward the end of the movie, he is the one who tortures the lead character, played my James McAvoy, by hanging him with hooks through his skin from the ceiling at the airport as he tries to escape Uganda. It's a violent and disturbing scene.

The Last King of Scotland

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iV_QgKJFZPO

Now it's time to drift off to sleep listening to the gentle hum of the fan while the mosquito net that covers my bed gently billows in its breeze.

Blessed by Africa



Maurice Kirya

Day 17

Wednesday, November 17

Fred Mutebi and I welcomed some friends to Uganda on Monday. They are art educators from Texas. Fred has formed a partnership with the **University of North Texas** that started when he collaborated with the university during his visit to Dallas in October 2008. He was a guest lecturer at the university and conducted printmaking workshops. He also played a key role in facilitating art education workshops at local elementary schools. The team that he worked with in Texas is now here in Uganda. **Leslie Robertson, Rebecca Schaefer,** and **Amanda Batson** have organized workshops that will take place in rural primary schools in the Masaka area. It's the community where Fred was born and raised. Many of his family still live there. It's a great example of how Fred is contributing to his community. They brought with them lots of art supplies that were generously donated from supporters. They packed a great variety of items like crayons, construction paper, paints, brushes, colored pencils, markers, and other useful items. They will all be used during the workshops and more importantly the items will be able to be utilized by the teachers and students in the future.

One of the other projects that our friends are here to collaborate with Fred on is the use of Ugandan **barkcloth**. It's a fascinating renewable fiber that is harvested and crafted from the mutuba tree in Uganda. The making of barkcloth has been a part of Ugandan culture for centuries. It's a very special fabric in the Buganda kingdom. The art of making barkcloth is disappearing to modern conveniences. I made this short video showing how barkcloth is made during one of my previous visits to Uganda.

The Making of Barkcloth

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ElhXnv52Ruk>

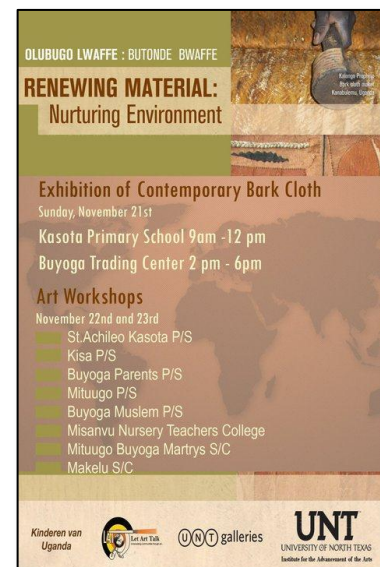
Fred wants to revitalize the barkcloth supply. He has a vision to help the environment in Uganda by planting a **million** mutuba trees. **Deforestation** in Uganda is a big problem. It's a problem all over Africa. Barkcloth can be harvested from the mutuba tree without killing the tree. The bark regenerates each time and the tree can live for over a hundred years. Barkcloth is a perfect example of a renewable fabric that is environmentally friendly. We want to be able to provide an income for the communities that provide barkcloth by creating a global demand for the unique fabric. We are exploring its uses with researchers, students, artists, fashion designers, interior decorators, and others. I'm an advocate of promoting **trade** with Uganda, not aid. This is a great initiative for the developed world to be environmentally conscientious and provide jobs and income for Ugandans.

You can learn more about the "**Renewing Materials**" barkcloth project on this great website.

Ugandan Barkcloth Project

<http://barkcloth.blogspot.com/>

Blessed by Africa



Ugandan barkcloth project

Day 18

Thursday, November 18

I had the opportunity to experience the superstar lifestyle of my friend **Maurice Kirya**. One of the radio stations in Kampala, Uganda had a contest to win a private lunch with Maurice at the posh **Serena Hotel**. Four lucky fans were picked by **93.3 KFM** to enjoy a fantastic meal at the picturesque resort and talk to Maurice about anything. He really appreciates his fans and it shows in how he treats them. I was a part of his entourage that included radio station personalities, journalists, and photographers. It was so much fun to be a part of such an event. **Orange Telecommunications** sponsored the contest and paid for the delicious meal. After lunch there was a photo shoot with his fans where he presented them with gifts and posed with each of them. His fans also had pictures taken with his **Radio France International Discovery Prize** award for best new African artist.



Maurice in Times Square

Maurice Kirya | Ugandan Musician

<http://www.reverbnation.com/mauricekirya>

One of the things that Maurice has worked very hard to do in Uganda is to promote live music. He has done it by having a show each month at **Club Rouge** called **The Maurice Kirya Experience**. The show includes talented musicians from Uganda, Africa, and around the world. It also mixes poetry and art into the show. It's a unique entertainment experience in Uganda.

I attended an amazing live concert by **Qwela**. They blend jazz, Afro-fusion, and traditional instrumentation into their music. They are a large ensemble band that reminds me of Sly and the Family Stone. They have a great groove. The concert was a fundraiser called "**Concert for Hope**" to benefit cancer research and treatment at the **International Hospital of Kampala**. I am a huge advocate for Ugandans helping Ugandans and this was a great event that accomplished that goal. I want to thank Joseph from Qwela for personally inviting me to the concert. I was inspired by the music and performance.

Qwela | Facebook

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Qwela/128295337868>

Qwela | "Mama Tokaaba"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0d4Hj23ibb4>

There are some incredibly talented people in Uganda that deserve to be appreciated. I'm privileged to know many of them. I encourage you to discover them too.

Blessed by Africa

Day 21

Sunday, November 21

I spent the weekend with **Fred Mutebi** and the team of art educators from Dallas out in the villages. These few days in Kasota and Buyoga villages located in the Masaka district are to conduct exhibitions and workshops. It's a part of the "**Renewing Material**" barkcloth project that has brought **Lesli Robertson, Amanda Batson, and Rebecca Schaefer** to Uganda as a part of their collaboration with Fred Mutebi and **Let Art Talk**.

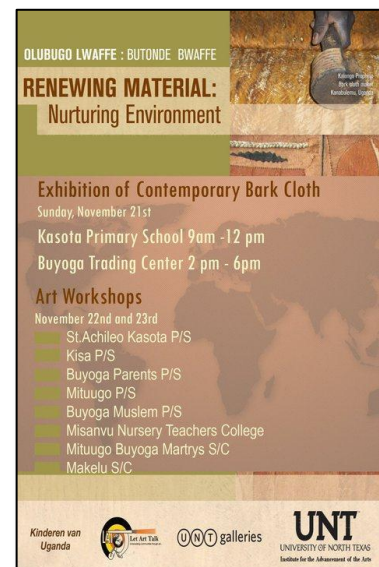
The exhibitions focused on the unique Uganda barkcloth material. Products made from barkcloth were on display from local artisans and professional artists from Uganda. There were also images of a variety of products that have been created by designers and researchers in other countries. Students from the local primary schools also had the opportunity to have their fantastic barkcloth creations on display for everyone to see. There was a very strong and powerful message in their creations to help preserve the environment and be responsible citizens.

It was great to see friends that I have met over the years and make lots of new friends. I tend to wander off and spend time with the children. It's definitely one of the things that I love about visiting Uganda. The country has a young population. Statistics show that 50% of Uganda's population is under 15 years old. I want to be able to connect with the youth here as they develop into the future leaders of the country.

I entertained the children with my "separated thumb" and "straw in the ear and out of the mouth" illusions. It always generates a large crowd as they watch muzungu muwanvu mulalu (the crazy tall white person) perform seemingly impossible acts. After several repeated demonstrations and lots of laughter, I always reveal to everyone gathered how the tricks are really done. My message to them is to stay in school and get an education so that they don't fall for people's tricks in life. They will be less likely to be fooled by those who would want to manipulate and exploit them if they gain knowledge and wisdom. It's a fun way to communicate an important message.

Fred Mutebi has done an incredible job in mobilizing his rural community. The team of art educators has formed a great partnership with him. It's a perfect example of the power of effective partnerships.

Blessed by Africa



Ugandan barkcloth project

Day 24

Wednesday, November 24

Everyone occasionally needs encouragement. The challenges of life can leave you exhausted and questioning your purpose. My visits to Uganda are also great periods of introspection and personal development. Sometimes I wonder if I'm doing the right things with my life. I wonder if I'm using my skills and talents effectively and for the right reasons. I wonder if I'm fulfilling the destiny that I was created to accomplish.

I have been blessed with an incredible wife. **Stephanie** is my biggest supporter. She understands my commitment to our friends in Uganda. She endures my passionate diatribes and shares in my concerns. Stephanie calls Africa my mistress. She's right.

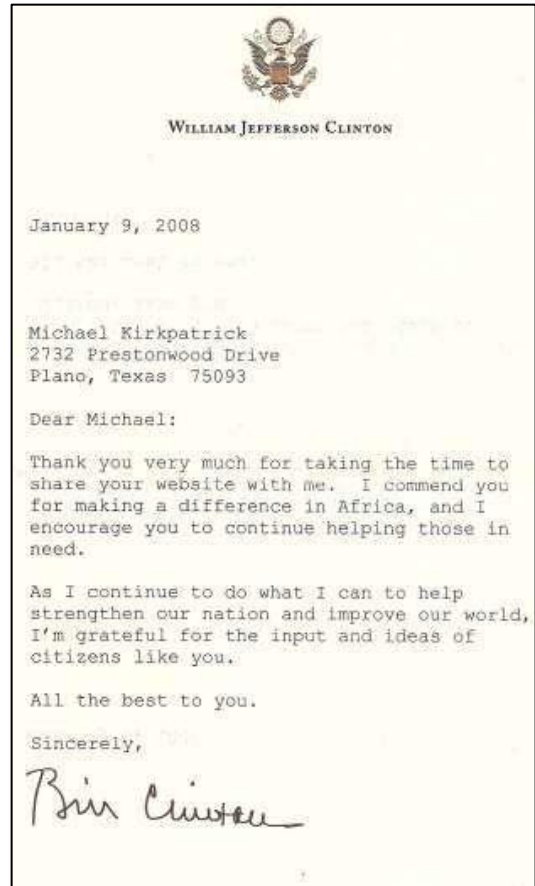
Every once in a while I get the encouragement that I need to move forward. It's usually from Stephanie or a friend. Many times it's from one of my African friends. During my last visit to Uganda in 2007, I received some encouragement from an unexpected source. I had sent a picture to the **Clinton Foundation** of one of the children reading "**Giving: How Each of Us Can Change the World**" by former **President Bill Clinton**. Stephanie had given me the book and I brought it with me to Uganda. The picture was posted on the Clinton Foundation website. A few weeks later I received a letter from Bill Clinton.

"Giving" | The Clinton Foundation

<http://giving.clintonfoundation.org/node/2274>

Hopefully I can be an encouragement to others. You never know when what you say or what you do will make a huge difference in someone's life.

Blessed by Africa



Letter from former President Bill Clinton

Day 28

Sunday, November 28

I spent the last weekend of my Ugandan adventure attending a fantastic conference in western Uganda near the town of Masindi. The **Villages in Action** conference was the inspiration of **Teddy Ruge**. His home village of Kikuube was strategically chosen to host the event. Teddy is a social entrepreneur who lives a nomadic life travelling between Dallas and Uganda and other places.

Teddy and **Project Diaspora** were motivated by a meeting that took place in September 2010 to discuss the **Millennium Development Goals** (MDGs) in New York City. World leaders, diplomats, academics, and development industry people came together to discuss the state of the poor in Africa. The poor according to them are similar to the people of Kikuube village. They spoke about poor people in their absence, like they didn't have a voice and referred to them as numbers.

Project Diaspora

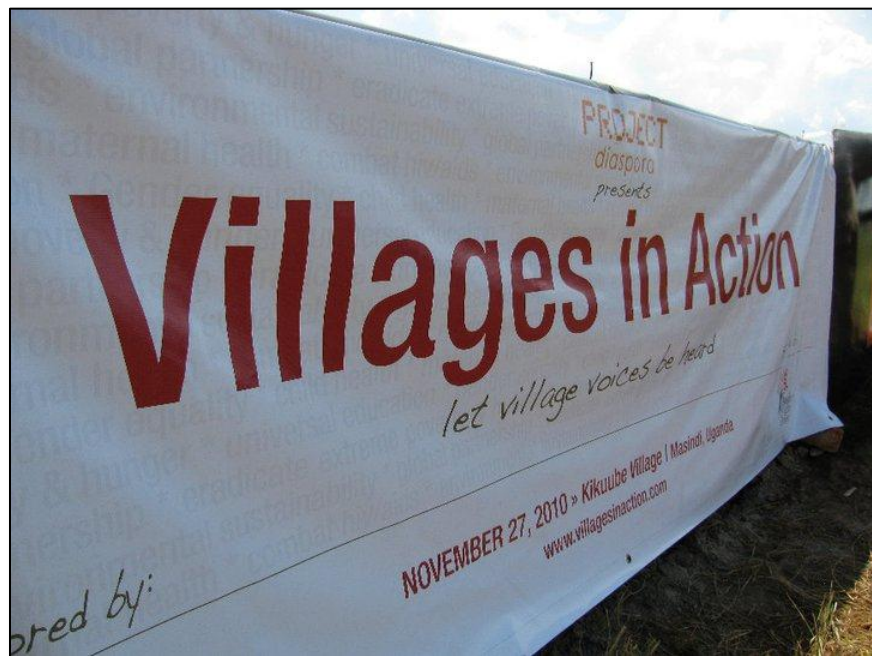
<http://projectdiaspora.org/>

Teddy decided that if global leaders in New York City didn't want to invite the poor to their conference that the best thing to do was to bring the conference to the village so that the poor can tell the world who they are, how they live, and the solutions that they come up with to their daily challenges.

It was absolutely brilliant.

Teddy and many others mobilized people and technology to give a voice to the silent majority. Hundreds of local people gathered to listen and be heard. Village business owners and farmers had the chance to finally represent themselves to the world and use their own words. Panelists discussed

topics regarding technology, education, farming, small business, entrepreneurship, and health. The keynote speech was given by **Milly Businge**. She is the local government representative for Kikuube village. She was surprised that as a government representative she had never heard of the **Millennium Development Goals** (MDGs) even though they had been launched in 2000 and created for the benefit of villages like Kikuube.



Project Diaspora organized the Villages in Action conference

Here is an excerpt from her keynote speech:

"I welcome the world to Kikuube today. Today is a historic day because for the first time in history, Kikuube gets the microphone to share with the world about how it is developing. We would like the entire world to know simply that we exist, and that we are empowered, we live, and we are real and not just a story. We would like you to know how we stand, how we survive, how we study, how we grow, our successes and our failures."

I will never forget the people that I met and the voices that I heard at the **Villages in Action** conference. There were many people that made the event possible. They deserve the highest praise for their efforts to make the event a success.

I also want to recognize the main sponsors of the event. **Orange™ Uganda** provided the technology that made it possible for the world to hear the voices of Kikuube village and to watch the conference via video link and internet access. **Business Fights Poverty** is a global network of people who believe that the best way to improve lives is by helping entrepreneurs succeed and sharing practical ideas about how to fight poverty through good business.

Business Fights Poverty

<http://businessfightspoverty.ning.com/>

Blessed by Africa



