

Peace Corps Uganda

NOTES AND
MUSINGS FROM
AMODING

Days spent in Uganda: 565
Homesick level (1-5): 2.9

Issue No. 4
Feb-March 2012



Big history in a small country

An extract from my final project report for my Masters in Public Administration in
International Public Service & Development at Rutgers-Camden

Uganda, roughly the size of the U.S. state of Oregon, is a country nestled amid the beauty and chaos of East Africa. A welcoming, affable folk, Ugandans are among the friendliest people in Africa. Fortunately, their magnetism is not a veneer. They are a talented populace and arguably the best resource the country has. Of the 34 million people who inhabit Uganda, over 85% live rurally. Most people are concentrated in the Bantu-speaking areas of the south and west as well as the capital city of Kampala. Several tribes, including the Iteso, inhabit the Nilotic-speaking north and northeast. Over 33 indigenous languages are spoken across the country, lending to a rich ethno-linguistic diversity.

The first Europeans arrived to the courts of the southern kingdoms in 1862. In the decades following,

rival European powers scrambled to gain control over the fertile lands of Uganda. They sent missionaries to bring Christianity and mercenaries to bring the promise of trade to the kabakas (kings). At the end of the 19th century, 5 kingdoms were formally included in a new British protectorate.

Unlike neighboring Kenya, Uganda was designated a protectorate and not a colony. This distinction meant the region was loosely governed by an administrative system; most regions had a high degree of autonomy and economic self-sufficiency. In the first half of the 20th century, most dealings between the British and Ugandans were harmonious; people were comfortable with the status quo. Until the 1950s, the build-up to independence was slow until a few forthright opponents to British rule

generated a liberation movement. British authorities stepped aside as political parties sprung up and held their own primary elections. On 9 October 1962, Milton Obote declared independence and became Uganda's first president.

The first ten years of independence saw tensions mount between local kingdoms, dissidents, political parties and President Obote, who titled himself 'Life President of Uganda'. In early 1971, an illiterate commander of the Ugandan army, Idi Amin, orchestrated a military takeover that drove Obote into exile.

Amin's leadership appeared innocuous at first. But his true nature was revealed when he ushered in a xenophobic campaign to expel all Asians from the country and repossessed their businesses for

(continued on page 2)

"The truth will set you free. But first it will piss you off." – Gloria Steinem

(from page 1)

state use. That economic catastrophe paired with secretive, murderous practices turned Amin into a hugely unpopular figure. In 1978, Tanzania invaded Uganda and threw the dictator out.

Amin's reign of terror was a stain on Ugandan politics. After his ousting, there was widespread hope that the brutalized nation could start afresh. This new dawn remained unrealized for 7 more years. The transition was marked with more anarchical chaos, extra-judicial killings and political double-dealing than occurred under Amin. The people were terrorized by a decrepit pseudo-government filled with political opportunists, corruption and intimidation.

Eventually, Yoweri Museveni and his Uganda Patriotic Movement rose up on a wave of populist support. After a series of bush wars and fractured negotiations, Museveni was sworn in as president on 26 January 1986. Among his accomplishments, Museveni re-instated rule of law, oversaw promising economic growth, encouraged foreign investment, granted official recognition of tribal kingdoms, funded the response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and supported the Ugandan People's Defense Force (UPDF) in pushing the Lord's Resistance Army guerrillas out of the county. Museveni has maintained a strong grip on the presidency for the past 26 years, despite surging political opposition and calls for a more multi-party democracy.

Notwithstanding the 3 turbulent decades of rebellion and autocracy stretching from 1965-1986, Uganda can be characterized as a relatively stable state. That very stability is ensured by heavy-handed, illiberal policies. President Museveni, who ushered in decades of growth and brought to an end bitter civil war, has

arguably turned into an authoritarian figure. It has also been said that the Museveni of 1986 would not approve of the Museveni of 2012. Among his African contemporaries, he is considered a bulwark of democracy. Among his ardent supporters, he is a gentleman farmer. Among his opponents, he is a mercurial autocrat and the very thing keeping Uganda from transformational growth.

Museveni often touts the state of Uganda as a testament to his decades of paternalistic guidance. In the early years of this presidency, Museveni represented a new breed of African leader. He was credited with restoring general stability in a country plagued by a revolving door of coups and civil wars. Many pronounced him the best president in the central-east region, a disciple of World Bank and IMF who championed structural adjustment programs and multi-party democracy. Ostensibly, Museveni and his National Resistance Movement (NRM) party appeared to trumpet transparency and free elections.

Conversely, Museveni changed the constitution to extend presidential term limits and won by a landslide all four times. There is strong evidence that the president rerouted foreign aid to purchase votes in every one of those elections. Most experts believe the NRM and the government officials it supports have become a clandestine network of monopolistic rule and patronage. The lamentable electoral process operates the ways it does because politicians are glorified and institutions are ignored.

In the eyes of many, Museveni has overstayed his welcome. As international pressure to reform and internal demand for change mounts, the iron-willed and largely unchallenged Museveni faces a tenuous political future. ■

Project Updates

This Month

The blind school's water sanitation project is well underway. But like all things in Uganda, it is going *mot mot* (slowly slowly). We have replaced the latrine cisterns but the rain tank and hand pump have not been installed. I'm hopeful things will wrap up in a week so that we can apply for Phase 2 funding.

March-June

- The serial radio drama for community behavior change and social development training at Voice of Teso has begun. We are still in the preliminary stage of assembling the script and production design teams. Commitment from staff and support from top management (including the MP for Soroti District) is still strong.
- Working with Madera Parish clergy to start a sack garden outreach for parishioners.
- Partnering with local NGO Forum to train NGOs on social entrepreneurship.

Blind girl outside school dormitory



ODE TO FRUIT

Bananas, mangoes, passion fruit

Oranges, papayas and jackfruit.

Juicy, abundant and oh so delicious

Affordable, addictive and super nutritious.

Do you know pineapples grow on trees?

With their anti-inflammatory properties, I'll take more, please!

Passion fruit makes a delicious juice

On a hot, dry day, it gives me a boost.

Bananas grow on every square inch of land

Their taste is superb, more than the Chiquita brand.

When it's mango season, they're all over town

Throw stones at trees to knock ripe ones down.

Spikey jackfruit can weigh up to 40 pounds

Massive size sends them crashing to the ground.

Oranges with green skins are best in Teso land
I always buy a few dozen from a local man.

Papayas grow wild with a shape somehow elliptical

Their enzyme-filled flesh makes breakfast unbelievable.

When fruit is before me, it never goes to waste
I've extolled their virtues; gee I wish you could taste!

Krest Omoding

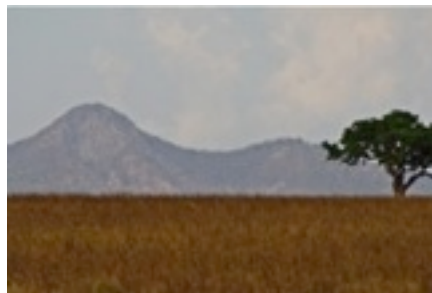
Say hello to my exotic pet bird, Krest Omoding. He is a grey crested crane and the national bird of Uganda. I recently adopted him and now he lives happily in the convent with the nuns and I. Right now, he's an adolescent. It will take several more months for him to acquire the red, yellow and black plumage that cranes are so famous

for. The Uganda Wildlife Authority have allowed me to keep him until a more permanent home can be established.



Recommended Reads

- Dark Star Safari by Paul Theroux
- Papillon by Henri Charriere
- Bossypants by Tina Fey
- King Leopold's Ghost by Adam Hothschild
- DUNE by Frank Herbert
- Dead Aid by Dambisa Moyo
- Confessions of an Economic Hit Man by John Perkins
- The Poisonwood Bible by Barbara Kingsolver



I wish I had....

- gifts for my community
- art supplies
- posters and pictures of America
- seeds for planting
- water flavoring packets
- anything from Trader Joe's and Whole Foods
- quinoa

- dried berries
- walnuts/pecans/almonds
- almond and/or PB M&Ms
- Colgate Whispers (small disposable toothbrushes)
- magazines
- long-burning candles (preferably with mosquito repellent)
- V neck t-shirts in various colors
- 5-blade disposable shaving razors

Mailing Address:

Teacher Amoding
St. Francis School for the Blind
P.O. Box 603
Soroti, Uganda

To deter tampering: Please write only "educational materials for the blind" on the customs form. Write "par avion" on the outside and cover with Christian symbols.