

# PIAF FELLOWS' FLYER

News and views for and by current Princeton in Africa Fellows.

September 2007



## FELLOWS DEPARTING FOR AFRICA



Left to right: Sarah Hammitt '04, *International Rescue Committee, Ethiopia*; Krista Nottage '07, *BroadReach Health Care, South Africa*; Katie White '07; *UN Population Fund, Senegal*; Liza Hillenbrand '04, *BroadReach Health Care, South Africa*; Becca Pass '02, *UN World Food Program, Senegal*

## FELLOWS WHO HAVE CONCLUDED FELLOWSHIPS

(some of whom escaped mention in previous issues of the Fellows' Flyer... our apologies!)

Welcome Back! Please let us know where you're headed next... and how we can keep in touch. Email [piafasst@princeton.edu](mailto:piafasst@princeton.edu)

**Mallika Ahluwalia**  
*UN WFP, Namibia*

**Eric Leroux**  
*BroadReach, South Africa*

**Susan Farbstein**  
*ICTJ, South Africa*

**Laura Schroeder**  
*UN WFP, Senegal*

## SAVE THE DATE!

**Princeton in Africa Annual Benefit**  
and  
**Presentation of the Princeton in Africa Medal**  
to  
Former Senate Majority Leader  
Bill Frist, M.D.  
*for his medical work in Africa*

November 15, 2007  
6:30 PM  
New York City

## HAPPY BIRTHDAY THIS MONTH TO...

September 6

Molly Fay  
Nahal Zebarjadi

September 11

Krista Nottage

September 29

Lide Paterno

# NOTES FROM THE FIELD

By Sandra Hart, '07-'08 Fellow at UN WFP in Mauritania

Ever imagine yourself in the middle of the desert? That's where I've spent the first two weeks of my PiAf fellowship. The sun in Nouakchott is outrageously bright, and instead of grass and soil there is sand, very few trees, and very little water. The slight disorientation of my first day at work was even punctuated by a sandstorm that raged outside the office window for a few hours.

At the UN World Food Programme here in Nouakchott, my position would be best described, for the moment, as Reports Officer and resident translator, as it seems I am only 1 of 4 people in the office who are able to speak both French (the working language) and English (the language of virtually all UN documents). I have also had the privilege of visiting a childhood nutrition center on the outskirts of the city and doing a preliminary analysis of how effective the operation was and whether or not the participants (mothers and female "presidents" of local communities) were satisfied, if they had suggestions, and how well they were implementing the WFP program. In the coming months, I will be doing everything from going on field missions to monitoring school feeding programs, translating documents, and assisting with emergency aid in areas that have been recently devastated by flash-flooding.

Nouakchott itself is a relatively slow-moving and tranquil city compared to most of sub-Saharan Africa. It is also a city of contradictions—for example, although poverty is a major problem due to lack of resources, all the taxicabs are Mercedes. Housing also seems to take the form of one of two extremes: Western-style two-story houses or huge nomadic tents, which are scattered all over the city.

Nonetheless, there are a lot of advantages to living here: most things are within walking distance, amazing French baguettes are at every corner, the beach is literally 10 minutes away, and seafood is cheap and plentiful. People are also extremely hospitable, but there are a few cultural factors that I am still adjusting to. Firstly, my work environment is 100% francophone, except for written documents. While I do speak French, this truly changes the nature of interactions between me and my co-workers! Secondly, adjusting to the dictates of Arab-Muslim culture (Mauritania is an Islamic State, after all)—as a woman—will certainly take some getting used to. Women are obliged to cover their heads and bodies and, for example, are not permitted to shake hands as a greeting. (Of course, I made the mistake of extending my hand on my third day at work!) Thirdly, everyone assumes I am from Mauritania or Algeria and is shocked to find out I'm American/Rwandan. This also means that I often encounter people who speak to me in Hassaniya (the Arabic dialect of Mauritania) or Arabic.

These (among other factors) make for a colorful and really interesting experience here in Mauritania. Above all, I'm just amazed by the nature of the desert environment—the dunes reach to the edge of the city and stretch as far as the eye can see, and camels are seen now and then within the city. Optimism, nervous excitement, a deepening desire to truly understand Mauritania and to do the best I can to help others are just a few of the emotions that I feel as I look forward to the coming year.



Above: Dunes on the outskirts of Nouakchott



Left: Sandra in African dress; below left: Sandra's neighborhood; below right: Sandra in the desert



# CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND THE INTERNATIONAL POWER OF CELEBRITY

by Emily Harris, '06-'07 Fellow at Plan International in Uganda



During those last few weeks of my senior year at Princeton, discussions about my plans for the upcoming year seemed to confuse some people.

"I'm going to work in Uganda," I would explain. "Ghana?" many would ask. "No, Uganda. In East Africa. Near Kenya." "Uh, ok. Cool." Most conversations went something like that. If people had heard of Uganda, it was either because of the atrocities of the late dictator Idi Amin or the heavily publicized Entebbe Raid of 1976. Not such good publicity. A few more development and healthcare oriented people knew that Uganda had been a poster child for HIV and AIDS prevention and treatment strategies during the 1990s, but these three points were generally the extent of people's knowledge about my destination.

Fast forward one year. Returning after my adventures rafting down the Nile River, kissing giraffes, climbing a volcano, watching the Kentucky Derby-esque goat races (where goats were racing and roasting within five feet of each other), dancing with music sensations, getting stiff-armed by national team rugby girls,

and carrying dowry baskets on my head during a colleague's *Kuangula* introduction ceremony (and, of course, doing a serious amount of hard work and learning at Plan International along the way), I arrived home to find that Forest Whitaker had almost single-handedly put Uganda on the map for Americans. Whenever my trip comes up in conversation – with the dentist, the guy at the photo-processing store, people at the post office – almost everyone quickly references *The Last King of Scotland*. People have lots of questions and opinions about the film, and all of a sudden everyone is interested in Uganda. Hollywood and the media have done it again.

Of course, information flows both ways. The week before the film's Ugandan premier last February, my bodaboda (motorbike taxi) driver was full of excitement. "The Hollywoods are coming, the Hollywoods are coming!" Whitaker was sensationalized for months before his arrival, and his eventual appearance, with the actor James McAvoy and director Kevin MacDonald, did not disappoint fans. While Ugandans had very mixed feelings about the representation of Idi Amin and their own history within the film, most agreed they were excited to have a major motion picture filmed in their country and were honored to have the attention of the Western world. They hoped this film could not only boost their economy but could also help jumpstart the local film industry. Say what you will about the "Hollywoodization" of history in movies such as *Hotel Rwanda*, *Blood Diamond*, or *The Last King of Scotland*, but these films, and their hype, have opened people's eyes to the existence of events like the Rwandan genocide and the wars over diamonds in West Africa. So for moviemakers from the US to have come to Uganda and spent months learning languages and culture and sharing this information with the rest of the world was a very big deal.

**"While lyrics such as 'Baby, don't be silly— put a condom on your willy' might seem bizarre... spreading healthy messages through musicians has worked."**

In the lingo of my NGO, this type of "cross-cultural communication" is something that can...

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*Above: Emily and friends during Sanitation Week; below left: Competitors trot around the track during the Royal Ascot Goat Races at Muyonyo, Uganda; below right: Actors James McAvoy (l) and Forest Whitaker (c) during a press conference for *The Last King of Scotland**



*continued from previous page* ...go a long way for promoting positive messages and behavior. Radio, the most prevalent and accessible media for communication in East Africa, uses airtime to host talk shows (about healthy living, destigmatization, job information, and human rights) which help share information and bring people together. Plus, music itself is unifying – just ask the 200 Ugandan rugby fans who, like me, braved the 14 hour overnight bus ride from Kampala to Nairobi to cheer for our hometown heroes, the National Rugby Cranes, during their annual triple-header grudge match with longtime rivals Kenya. With Ugandan hits blasting from our rival’s speakers, fans were very pumped up. While some East African hits have lyrics that describe the typical highs and lows of relationships, other songs such as “Safe Sex” use hot beats to spread important health and safety messages. While lyrics such as “Baby, don’t be silly - put a condom on your willy” might seem bizarre, or at least too in-your-face, this song proved to be a very popular hit, at least as far as Kampala hangouts and radio stations are concerned. Spreading healthy messages through musicians has worked.

Enter “Kadingo Song” by Bobi Wine, Artist of the Year from the 2006/2007 Pearl of Africa Music Awards (think East African Grammys). This hit single, which tells the story of a man who practices unhealthy sanitation and hygiene routines, encourages people to follow healthy practices and keep their living environment safe for themselves and others. So in keeping with the power of celebrity to spread messages, I worked with our Water and Sanitation advisor and two other upper-level members of the National Sanitation Working Group to include Bobi Wine and his hit song in our 2007 Sanitation Week and World Water Day activities this spring. We arranged daylong concerts and healthy living sanitation exhibitions in each of Uganda’s four regions to promote healthy practices for children, families, and communities. Under the national slogan “Total Sanitation: Is Your Neighbour Killing You?” we emphasized how good hygiene and sanitation practices are not only the responsibility of individual families, but are also important from a community standpoint as resources and environments are shared. The national exhibition, held at the Kawempe Muslim Primary School football pitch, included stalls demonstrating water purifying techniques, sanitary water storage units, proper defecation practices, etc. – all held in the same slum area where, six months earlier, widespread flooding combined with open defecation and improper waste management had instigated a serious cholera outbreak. By promoting the appearance of Bobi Wine we attracted lots of city-wide attention for the national event which many ministers of Parliament, local NGOs, schoolchildren, and community groups attended for a day of fun learning and information sharing.

**“When you get right down to it, once I learned that Shakira’s hips don’t lie in Uganda either, I felt right at home.”**

This year I have witnessed how local popular culture and its icons can make a difference in promoting cross-cultural understanding and positive lifestyles. The power of celebrity is an international phenomenon that can be more influential, and more positive, than you might think. Sometimes these lessons help us understand differences about other cultures, and sometimes they make us realize that culture can be a common denominator after all. When you get right down to it, once I learned that Shakira’s hips don’t lie in Uganda either, I felt right at home.

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*Above:* Primary school children participated in a good hygiene quiz during the National Sanitation Week celebrations.



*Left:* Ugandan fans celebrate a victory in a rugby tournament; *below:* Emily feeds a cracker to a friend at the Giraffe Center outside Nairobi



Hey, returning and other recently returned Fellows: We want to feature your words and photos here, too! Email [piafasst@princeton.edu](mailto:piafasst@princeton.edu)