

PRINCETON IN AFRICA

Final Report

This report focuses on your observations, reactions, realizations, and insights after completion of your fellowship. It will be shared with board members and future Fellows and used to improve the quality of fellowships. We hope it will help you to continue processing your time in Africa. We encourage you to make additions in the form of personal letters, a collection of anecdotes, photos, etc., and you are encouraged to draw conclusions or highlight observations with additional commentary as well as simply relating events.

Please indicate when information is not to be shared outside of PiAf and rest assured that we will honor your request.

Reports should be submitted via email to piaf@princeton.edu and shooper@princeton.edu. The deadline is the last day of the month in which your fellowship ends. (Example: Fiona Fellow finishes work July 10th and returns home to the U.S. on July 16th. Her final report is due July 31st.)

Your Personal Information

Organization: Plan Uganda
City, Country: Kampala, Uganda

FELLOWSHIP END DATE: June 29th (extended one more year)

ANTICIPATED RETURN DATE: not yet known

What do you plan to do next? Please be specific! (e.g., attend Harvard Med, be a barista at Starbucks, teach English in Cameroon, etc.)

Continue on in the same position in Kampala with Plan Uganda

Your Travel and Other Logistical Information

1. How will you travel when you depart your host country? Please be specific in terms of what airlines(s), what cities you will fly to/from, how much your ticket cost (was this travel part of a roundtrip you purchased earlier?) how did you find/purchase your tickets, etc.

N/A

2. Any travel tips to share with future Fellows?

Send out emails to try to coordinate with other fellows, or, even better, go visit other fellows and have them help you plan your trip! In terms of getting to the African continent and back... definitely book your flights as early as possible and play around with dates, cities, and itineraries; Kayak.com is great.

3. Did you experience any health problems during your stay in Africa?

During my fellowship, I herniated a disc in my back in October, which I was able to determine on x-ray. Unfortunately, there was not much to do for the injury, so I took some time off of work, modified my daily routine to limit my sitting and I purchased a spring mattress (the foam one probably contributed to it, in addition to far too much sitting). After about six months, I was fully functional (I didn't have to stand in meetings all the

time). Thankfully the injury was not more severe and did not require specialized medical attention. Other than that, I haven't experienced anything more severe than a common cold/minor stomach bug (the usual).

4. Have you utilized the health insurance PiAf or your host organization provided you? Please describe any interactions or experiences—positive or negative—you have had with your health insurance company or policy. Please include the name of the provider in your response.

At the time that I injured my back, I contacted the health insurance provider. However, since I ended up utilizing minimal medical services, I did not end up making a claim. They were very helpful and responsive to my calls during the process.

5. Did you take anti-malarials during your fellowship? If so, what kind and how/where did you acquire them?

No, I stopped after one month.

Your Work

6. Please summarize all of the work you did this year as you would on your résumé or CV.

Technical Writer – Grants Department

- Co-taught three-day proposal-writing workshops in the field offices
- Organized and maintained all grant-related information on the shared server
- Managed the timely submission of and edited all grant reports each quarter (approximately 30 active grants)
- Conceptualized, organized, and executed two day-long anniversary celebrations (20 years in Uganda, and 75 years internationally) with over 1,000 attendees at each (mostly children)
 - Managed two planning committees of ten people and a large budget
 - Celebrations included: lunch, cake, refreshments, transport to and from, t-shirts, hats, children's games, drawing spaces, performances by children and a popular local artist (among other things)

7. How would you evaluate your work? What do you feel you were able to contribute? How might you have been more effective?

My boss was extremely happy with my ability to pick up the tasks given to me and I found the work was easy enough to do well. However, in retrospect, I wish I had acquired more additional tasks earlier. I am now getting involved with a gender-based violence prevention project in Kampala and I am finding the work interesting.

8. What accomplishments from your fellowship are you most proud of?

I was very proud of my planning and execution of the anniversary celebrations. The events went very smoothly and according to schedule. We were able to include a large number of people, the many children in attendance enjoyed the event very much, and we got some good press coverage; thus we accomplished all of our goals. The event was also significantly under the budget, which was a great victory, especially considering that the management was convinced that it would come in way over budget.

I am also proud of my ability to start and maintain a blog. It sounds funny, but I definitely didn't think I was going to make it through the year because I was going to hate it, but I ended up really liking the blogging process in the end. I intend to maintain a blog next year also as it has also allowed me to reflect and have insights that I am not sure that I would have realized as clearly otherwise.

9. During PiAf's Pre-departure Orientation in May 2010, you listed three things you hoped to gain from your experience as a PiAf Fellow. What were they? (To refresh your memory, we have recently emailed these to you.) Did you achieve these goals? How has your fellowship affected other goals you have/will set for the future?

Well I just came back to my three goals (after forgetting about them until now) and they are as follows:

1. Experience managing my own project
2. Learn about local beliefs and ideas
3. Field experience

I will start with number one and work my way down. Although I didn't ask for it or initially want it, the anniversary celebrations became my own project, and I can confidently say that I gained incredible professional and managerial experience by coordinating the celebrations. The celebrations required that I work with all of the staff in our field offices where the celebrations took place, and in the process I learned an enormous amount about how to ask for help and how to get what I needed.

The second goal I have most definitely worked toward (and do so every day). I am continually surprised to learn new things about the many cultures in Uganda...some cultural phenomena are more deeply buried than others and I don't think I will ever stop learning new things!

I have been less successful with this last goal of getting field experience. It has been difficult to get directly involved in projects due to the fact that I am based in Kampala (which has few programs) and the nature of my work. However, I have just started working on a project that is being carried out in Kampala, which is a sort of field work. Though, the project is less "field" oriented than I would like it to be because we are working with partners. Since I haven't been very involved in implementation myself, I am going to arrange a tour of our programs, so I can at least better understand all of Plan's work.

10. What kind of a person would do well in this fellowship or one like it? Do you have any specific advice for future Fellows who are interested in this position?

This fellowship is good for someone who likes to work with many different people, though can be content to be at a desk for most of the time.

Your Reflections

11. What did you find most inspiring about/during your fellowship experience?

The resilience of people is truly inspiring. Nearly every Ugandan will tell you an absolutely heart-breaking story of misfortune, poverty, friends and family dying far too young, and yet they can put on a smile through it all. Life is universally valued here; there is not depression and angst the same way there is in the west (especially amongst the rich), which is very refreshing.

12. What have you learned about your own values and worldview through living abroad this year?

I realize how much I love my family and friends, and that how no matter how far away I am from home these people are still a vitally essential part of my life and support system. In that same vein, although the internet allows us to stay connected in a way that is truly incredible, nothing can substitute for time actually spent together.

I highly value exploring (and learning by exploring), though that is certainly not how many other people feel. I am continually surprised by learning that some Ugandans don't like to travel, and they don't understand why I do.

I also don't view myself as American, though people here see me through that lens. My identity is not tied into my birth place in quite the same way that Ugandans identify with the culture and place of their birth. I have no place that I could call "the village" the same way people here call their homes or places of birth.

13. Looking back, what does PiAf mean to you? How did this experience affect you? What did you learn or gain from your fellowship? (This is another chance for you to give us good fodder for our marketing materials!) ;)

This question is literally impossible to answer since I could write a novel on this subject. But let's see how much I can summarize in a reasonable length...

Princeton in Africa has irrevocably changed my life. I came to Uganda thinking that I had a pretty good idea of what life was about, but every experience here has challenged me to reconsider everything that I "know" to be true. Though, in order to express this more fully, I adopted an excerpt from an email that I sent my grandpa in response to a terrific article in Harper's Magazine written by a medical volunteer about her time in Uganda, which can be found here <http://www.harpers.org/archive/2012/07/0083970> :

I really resonated with the internal struggle of the narrator of how to find a place or if one even has a place here as a foreigner. It is a question that I grapple with nearly daily, since like the author mentions, we dangle impossible wealth in front of the poorest of the poor and really think nothing of what this means for Ugandans after we leave. Though besides the internal monologue, the article beautifully captured the dirt, the energy, the novelty, and the simplicity that makes life in Uganda so easy to fall for.

It is the fact that life is so simple here that makes me love the place, though I also simultaneously realize that for many it is not simple. The poor, the disabled, the elderly, the women and girls face unbelievable challenges and misfortune. These people have to fight their whole lives for the bare necessities of food, shelter, and clothing, while I enjoy my privileged life in Kampala (and the US). It is really overwhelming to try to consider all of those who live through terrible misfortune time after time in their lives, so, just like the article mentions, we (the rich) never really see the poor. We can't because it is too hard to imagine what life could really be like if we were born somewhere else to someone else. The best we can do is sit with the poor, and I guess this is what I try to do... whenever my Western cerebral planning mode doesn't overtake me.

Due at least in part to this abundant misfortune (at least in western terms), Ugandans have developed the most amazing positive outlook on life in order to deal with the constant presence of loss and uncertainty. Here, every day is truly a gift. Why rush if you never know if you will even get there? The realization that life is temporary and fleeting is both liberating and terrifying. I am also coming to terms with the fact that life is in no way fair, rational, or predictable. We all live in the same crazy shifting world and the best way through it is to develop a sense of humor and humility and just get on with it because you never know what the next day will bring, good or bad.

14. What will you miss the most once your fellowship has ended?

The amazingly warm people, relaxed way of life, and great local music

15. Are there a number of things in your life that once seemed unusual but now seem normal? Please share a few...

- No power, typical
- Not being able to find what you want in the supermarket...no milk, garlic, bread, you know, the basics
- Things being canceled at the time that they are supposed to happen, or even after the start time
- Not being able to go somewhere because of the rain
- Allowing tons of extra time to complete basic things, knowing that there are infinite things that could interrupt my plans
- Having a maid clean every day...Best. Thing. Ever. (I live in a big shared house)
- Dealing entirely in cash, the credit card is completely useless most of the time
- Not knowing how to do something, where to go to get something, or who to ask...still happens all the time

- Prices everywhere are negotiable. Including the forex bureau, shops and large chains.
- The saying “ask and ye shall receive” is infinitely applicable; you just have to ask the right person, who knows someone who knows someone, who can get what you need.

16. What perceptions of Americans/expats have you encountered while in Africa? Are there any common misconceptions?

Americans are generally highly regarded here; Obama is a big contributing factor to our popularity. In terms of stereotypes:

- we have lots of money – true, considering the per capita income is 490 US dollars per year, as reported by UNICEF
- no white person in Kampala actually lives here, instead we are all traveling through – clearly not true
- Americans/expats have no sense of style – kind of true if you see the kind of things that Americans wear here as compared to the well-dressed Ugandans
- expats are generally looking for low-commitment sexual relationships – there is plenty of this around, sex tourism is everywhere, but it is not a fair blanket statement in the least

17. What misconceptions do Americans/foreigners generally have about the country in which you are living?

That I live in the jungle and I have to carry around a machete to fend off the wildlife. That is only the tiniest exaggeration of the things I get. Also my friends thought there were no supermarkets (there is a Shoprite 15 min from my house)

18. If you could go back to the start of your fellowship year and do anything differently, would you? If so, what? What do you know now that you wish you had known at the beginning of your PiAf fellowship?

I wish I understood how much about life here is about money and how it can create a lot of strange relationships if you aren't careful. Money has never been an object in my life until now...it is talked about all the time everywhere because it is ESSENTIAL to get the bare necessities: there is no welfare system here.

19. Do you have any specific suggestions for improving your fellowship position or Princeton in Africa fellowships in general?

I had a few friends that did Global Health Corps fellowships and they talked about a lot of group activities that they found very helpful; I wish Princeton in Africa had more of these. Maybe in addition to the initial orientation, one on the continent a few months in and then another around the middle/end. I think that would have really helped me to make the most of my time here, and connect with more amazing fellows! It was hard to make connections after the initial orientation (which was such a whirlwind that it was hard to make connections there too). It was great to have the half-way retreat, but I wish it was more officially endorsed and funded.

20. How do you think Princeton in Africa board members and staff helped you over the year—or could have helped you more? Do you have any specific suggestions for improving interactions with the PiAf office or program representatives?

I had great interactions with the office, though I think a few more check-in emails would have been good. I know I am not good at initiating conversation (especially via email), so a bit more proactive check-ins would have helped to open the lines of communication for me (though I also know that many people do not have this hindrance, and might find these check-ins unnecessary).

21. Any other comments/suggestions to share?

Final

Thank you so much for giving me this opportunity. Like I mentioned above, this experience has revolutionized my world and made me grow, change, and adapt as I never knew I could. Shameless plug: everyone should have an opportunity to open their world with a Princeton in Africa fellowship so we could all be better global citizens.