UNFINISHED JOURNEY

Memories of the road travelled

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Unfinished Journey

Published by Regional Universities Forum for
Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM)
Registered Office:
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Makerere University Main Campus
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Telephone: +256 417 713 300
www.ruforum.org

First published 2019

ISBN: 978:9970-861-00-2

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Layout & cover design: Feroza Sarlie Motara
Printing by Jetline Parktown

This book is dedicated to...

My father (Boniface Edimu), my mother (Polina Atim), Ada Adongo, Imata Amayo and my uncle Stanley Ewalu – all of whom sacrificed so much to send me to school.

My sisters – who did not get the opportunity to go to school, so that the few resources available could be used to support my education.

My dear wife Theopista Nagujja – who gave me the most beautiful time in my life and loved my people and community dearly.

My dear children: Milton Edimu, Raymond Ekwamu, Polina Atim, Theopista Nagujja Adipala and Mika Euchu Eyadu – whom I have hardly had time to stay with and who had to share the little we had with so many others.

And wherever they are, my three beautiful childhood friends: Awada, Awalo and Jane Apila.

To the many others with whom I have travelled this journey – thank you for helping me travel this far.

And to the RUFORUM fraternity – thank you for making me believe in my continent and its people and the diversity we have.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AICM	Agriculture Information and Communication Management
ARC	Agricultural Research Corporation
ASARECA	Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa
AUC	African Union Commission
BMGF	Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
C10	Committee of Ten Heads of State and Government
CAADP	Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme
CARP	Community Action Research Project
CGIAR	Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
EU	European Union
FARA	Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa
FRELIMO	*Frente de Libertação de Moçambique* (Mozambique Liberation Front)
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICRAF	World Agroforestry Centre
ICRISAT	International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
LUANAR	Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MFAD	Manpower for Agricultural Development
MSc	Master of Science
Mt	Mount
NARS	National Agricultural Research System
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NRM	National Resistance Movement
PI	Principal Investigator
P'KWI	Popular Knowledge Women's Initiative
SCARDA	Strengthening Capacity for Agricultural Research and Development
UK	United Kingdom
UPC	Uganda People's Congress
US$	United States Dollar
US	United States
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WUR	Wageningen University of Agriculture and Research Centre

TRANSLATIONS

adol	a type of fish
amukeke	dry potato
atap	millet flour (eastern Uganda)
boyo	pasted cowpea leaves
bushera	fermented millet porridge
chak	sour milk from cows
chapati	flatbread
echirukukwai	small-seeded, tasty variety of cowpea
ekeko	house/'door'
kabaka	king
kalo (or karo)	millet flour (western Uganda)
kata	fresh potato
katono	small (in the Buganda language)
kongo ting	millet brew
Kwer	a post-birth ceremony anointing the mother to the clan
kwon	millet bread
Malaya	sex worker
malo	backward/primitive
matoke	green cooking bananas (East African Highland bananas, indigenous to central-west Uganda)
mo dyang	cow butter
mudokolo	backward/primitive
posho	maize porridge/flour
rec	a local fish
sim-sim	sesame seeds
waragi	home brew/gin

MAP OF UGANDA

CHAPTER 1

ROOTS IN THE VILLAGE

My story begins in a small village at the edge of a large swamp in eastern Uganda, in the district of Kaberamaido, a semi-arid region where my people, once proud cattle herders and fishermen, now find themselves on the wrong side of socio-economic divides shaping the modern world. Here, I was lucky to be raised by a formidable trio of clan mothers who valued education: they toiled, schemed and fought for me to attain it no matter what the family sacrificed. As the favoured son – the *only* son – and oldest of 13 offspring, I was the privileged recipient of a modern education that marked out a different life path for me from that of my sisters as well as most members of my clan – a reality that has brought me both great joy and sorrow over the years. The sacrifice of a younger sister to early marriage, as the cows given over for her bride price were sold off to keep me in school, is one memory that haunts me to this day.

I was born into the Adipala clan, whose history is kept by my 'grandmother' Ada Adongo. She is fondly referred to either as 'the girl' or 'the man' of the Adipala clan, as she has always defended the clan – often more strongly than the men have! In addition to supporting my education, she took great care of me as a child, and continues to even though she is now more than 100 years old. Ada

recently reminded me of the stories of my forebears who established themselves at Kaberamaido, which means 'a good place for groundnuts'. Kaberamaido is the seat of the Kumam people, a tiny tribe numbering probably fewer than 350,000 native speakers to this day, who share common lineages with the wild cattle raiders of East Africa – the Karamojong and the Masai – as well as the Iteso, Luo, Acholi and Langi and other tribes who sometime around the 17th century CE migrated south from Ethiopia (then Abyssinia), escaping the pressures of a growing population on the land.

My father's people belonged to the neighbouring Iteso tribe but several generations ago the incessant philandering of one relative caused a rupture within the clan. Our people have customarily counted their wealth in cattle – and for each of this relative's many transgressions with women, he and his family had been forced to pay in cattle. His multiple offences had steadily drained the resources of his entire clan, and they were fed up with it. As his own brother remarked, 'If you have a house with a grass-thatched roof, and you remove one piece of grass, does your roof leak? No!'

They meant to kill him. But instead this relative escaped with his mother and his two wives from their lands close to the present-day town of Serere, across the local fringes of the massive Lake Kyoga, to some of their relatives on the Kumam side of the swamp. Through various acts of merit, this man eventually established himself as a local parish chief. And it was to this homestead that my own biological grandfather, Ibrahim Eyadu, later fled as a child from his own household, where he had suffered neglect, and was welcomed into this breakaway section of the clan living on the other side of the swamp. Here my grandfather remained, tending his own herds of cattle and growing comparatively wealthy from the once-abundant fish in the swamp, and eventually becoming a local chief in his own right.

Our Kuman people follow their cows. It is the cows that weave the relationships among members of the clan through marriage. A

house, or 'door' (*ekeko*) affirms its ties with the clan by contributing cows to bring new brides into the clan. So although Ada Adongo and my father, Boniface Edimu, were not biological siblings, they grew up in the same household and regarded each other as brother and sister, because of the family relationships that had been woven through the exchange of marriage cows. And so it was that when Ada and her (now late) husband later contributed cows towards the bride price to enable my father, Boniface Edimu, to marry my mother, Polina Atim, a special bond was strengthened between all of us that endures to this day.

Many of these things only dawned on me later in life. It is a price I have paid for following the 'modern education path', which invariably made me lose some of the core cultural values of our people. I only fully realised the strength and value of the clan linkages, for instance, when people travelled up to 80 kilometres on foot to come to my home and bury my wife – *their* wife – Theopista Nagujja 'Amoit Edimu'!

For many years, I had a false impression of my birth. The story I had always heard was that my mother had given birth to me on the verandah of our grass-thatched hut. But as I recently learned on a visit back home, it was not so. Another boy had been born three years before me but had died, presumably from measles, when he was just 2 months old. Unwilling to risk the loss of a second child, on the night my mother was in labour somebody fetched a bicycle and we were borne to Lwala Hospital some 18 kilometres away. It was there, surrounded by solicitous and adoring aunties, that I drew my first breaths. Ada Adongo came to the hospital with other members of the clan. She talks of an eloquent white woman – a nun they called 'Sister' – who received the party of relatives and asked the trainee nurses, young ladies wearing green dresses with white hats, to take them to the ward where I was being kept. Meeting me for the first time, they couldn't help but start dancing in the ward and singing our clan songs. They sent a young man

to rush on foot to deliver the news to my grandfather (not to my father!) the chief, Ibrahim Eyadu: 'We have a baby boy!'

I was welcomed into the clan, and the world at large, with a ceremony that is a very special part of my culture. The women all gathered and started preparing *kongo ting*, the millet brew. They tied a string around my neck and around the necks of my mother and all my immediate grandmothers. Once these strings broke off naturally, they were all gathered together and placed in the waters of the swamp, as symbols of our lineage and connection to the clan.

In our culture, the thread heralds the long unknown journey ahead. It symbolises the passage one has to travel through life, and acknowledges the road that many others have travelled before – the continuous journey of life over generations. As the women release the strings and watch them flow in the water, the old ones talk to the young women of the clan, sharing the history of their ancestors and the journey of the clan that started somewhere in Abyssinia (today Ethiopia). Some came through South Sudan and others through Moroto, and then many separated at Moru Olem and Otuke, and took different directions. The Iteso – who have the reputation of being the uncontrolled or impatient ones – moved on to Amuria and Usuk, to Kumi and then to Ngora, while some crossed to Kenya to follow the Masai. Our Kumam people – we have the reputation of being the stupid and stubborn ones – travelled with the Iteso to Kumi and parts of Ngora, then turned back to the present-day Serere, Soroti and Kaberamaido, becoming neighbours to our other kinsmen and kinswomen, the Langi (who have the reputation of being stupid and backward), with whom we continued to fight fierce battles over many years. The old generation of Kumam talk of the Langi as people with very sharp spears who run very fast!

The strings are all released together into the swamp, and the women stand at the fringes to watch as they float away. Sometimes the strings are caught up in water reeds, symbolising struggle; and sometimes they escape the reeds and continue their journeys

to places unseen, just as we Kumam were once together with our kinsmen and kinswomen – the Karamojong, Iteso, Langi, Kalegin, Masai – but all took different routes and ended up in different places. The elders say: 'You, the young women of the clan, must struggle to keep the clan together, but your daughters will travel different routes to create new homes, some in unknown places.'

On the third day after I was born, there was a celebration led by the women of the clan. For the first two days I had been kept indoors, as is the custom. On the third day, my mother sat on the verandah holding me, and the women gathered around her to name me and give my mother presents. Importantly, they bring a drop of the *kongo ting* and put it in the mouth of the baby saying, 'Welcome to the world; this is our food, our drink; share it with your family and others.' The women are giving important instructions for life. They are saying, in effect, 'Make sure you always have *kwon* (our local millet bread) and the millet brew *kongo ting* in your home. And don't be greedy: you are to share with others!' Indeed, in the Kumam culture, if a visitor came and you gave them food but no drink, they would complain that you did not receive them well. If you gave them *kongo ting* and no food, however, they would not complain!

During this celebration, my grandmothers named me 'Ekwamu', after a big, greedy grandfather of mine who had liked to eat fish. In my clan, Ekwamu means 'the greedy one' or 'wind'. This same grandfather was also sometimes called 'Adololia' – the one who folds big chunks of fish to eat. This was in reference to the *adol*, one of our local fish in the swamp, similar to ocean sardines, which used to swarm so abundantly in our waters during the rainy season that you could scoop them out by the basketful. The fish is oily and soft, and when you dry it and cook it, you just fold it and put it into your mouth. The word for 'folding' in Kumam is *dolo*, and that is what the fish was called: *adol*. Even if it was fresh, you could just fold it and put it into your mouth. Sometimes my grandmother Ada Adongo calls me 'Adololia'!

I don't know if she and my other grandmothers looked at me and saw that I was going to be a greedy person. But I think they had great wisdom because I recall my late wife complaining that I ate too much and was getting too fat. How I miss her food to this day! My mother would bring dry *adol* whenever she travelled to visit us in Kampala and would instruct my wife on how to prepare the fish with groundnut sauce and serve it with *kwon*.

Some days or weeks after my naming ceremony, there came another ceremony – *Kwer* – which anoints the mother to the clan. For this celebration, the women from my mother's side of the family had to carry the millet beer in pots on their heads, walking the distance of about eight kilometres to the homestead where the cows had come from that paid for my mother's bride price. This is the best ceremony in our culture, and it is a celebration that is all about the women. They prepare the richest and tastiest food: in addition to millet brew, there are roasted groundnuts and sesame seeds (*sim-sim*), and cowpeas. The new mother is fed on *sim-sim* and local indigenous vegetables: foods that are not heavy, but are thought to be gentle and healing for the stomach after she has given birth.

In Kumam culture, women do the cooking and usually serve men first, then children and themselves last. But not on this occasion: they serve themselves first. And the men often complain that the women cook the best food on this occasion, and keep the best pieces of meat for themselves. For some reason, women were not allowed to eat chicken (although lately they have rebelled against this custom, and have even been known to eat the gizzards, which were traditionally the most taboo). I even recall my father taking my mother to her father to demand payment of a fine, because my mother had eaten chicken! Of course my grandfather (Mika Euchu) paid a fine of two he-goats. One was slaughtered for the clan members and the other was given to my father's father, Ibrahim Eyadu, as part of the apology from Mika Euchu for the

'bad behaviour' of his daughter, Polina Atim, my mother! For us youngsters, this was a good opportunity to eat meat!

The women dance most of the day alone during the *Kwer* ceremony. However, they are joined by one of the father-in-law's nephews (the son of one of the sisters of the father-in-law) because in Kuman culture a nephew may inherit from the uncle's home. Men attend the ceremony but must be very disciplined because the women use the occasion to throw insults at them, and if the men react, they must pay by providing goats that the women immediately slaughter and cook, or some other heavy price. The women do everything they can to incite a reaction from the men, who also dance but try to keep their distance from the women to avoid getting into trouble and paying fines!

The household I grew up in was typical of a large, extended family. As was common in my culture, the composition of our household was not determined by direct biological relationships, but rather by the practical consideration of providing cows for all the young men of the clan for marriage. Our 'door' (*ekeko*) was one of many households within the larger clan, and what bonded us together as a household were the cows that were exchanged through the marriages of various sons and daughters of the clan. For instance, as a child, I always thought Ada Akello (the mother of Ada Adongo) was my biological grandmother; it was only when I was about 16 and had just finished senior secondary school that I learned this was not so. And, by the same token, I had associated little with my biological grandmother Rebecca Ayoko – my father's mother; she was just one of my grandmothers. You see, my grandfather had five wives, and at one point he was married to as many as seven wives. My biological grandmother Ayoko had produced a girl and three boys. The girl married, and the cows given to the family for her bride price went towards marrying for the eldest son, Etenu. My father (Edimu) was the second son, while the youngest was Ekwamu who, as the youngest, was not prioritised since he was

sent away to study. (It was this youngest son, my uncle Ekwamu, who was later to take me away to school.)

My father was moved to a house that had two daughters and no boys, so that he could marry. One of those daughters was Ada Adongo. She became the 'sister' of Edimu, my father – and thus my 'aunt' – and that is the house I grew up in. After my grandmothers died, Ada Adongo became our grandmother, our '*Ada*'.

Ada was everything to us. She cooked fish and groundnuts for us, cared for us, and came often to my father's house to check that we were all right. I even built my first house, a grass-thatched hut, at the compound of Ada Akello, the mother of Ada Adongo. Ada Adongo and my mother dug and weeded their gardens together. Whenever there was any kind of issue to be addressed, Ada Adongo was there for her 'brother', my father, whom she fondly called 'Elyasu' in reference to his being a great traditional dancer and athlete. She was always there for our family and clan.

Home life was happy. All the families were very united. They would stay together, and eat together, like one big family. The togetherness was very strong, and as children we felt at home no matter whose house we were in – with the exception of the home of Ekwamu, the grandfather from whom I got my name. He died when I was young and left a widow named Abule, a very greedy old woman. If she saw children or even adults coming she would shut the door of her kitchen so that people would not see what she was cooking! She liked to eat alone. One day, she rushed to pick up a boiling saucepan in which she was cooking fish, and the hot food spilled out and burnt her very badly. We children were delighted about this and ran to tell our grandfather Ibrahim Eyadu what had happened. He rushed to her house and shouted at her, 'See what being greedy has done to you! The spirits of our people have punished you for being greedy.' She was as greedy as her husband, Ekwamu, my namesake. I wonder if I might not also be that greedy!

Before school shaped a new destiny for me, I lived the typical life of a young boy in my village called Olyanai, which means 'the smelly place' in our local Kumam tongue. Our lives were shaped by the seasonal rhythms of the swamp, which ultimately drained to the River Nile. Indeed it was a smelly place, especially during the rainy months from April to June, when the floodwaters swept such abundant shoals of another local fish species called *rec* to our shores that you could gather them from the road in baskets; and afterwards, when the waters receded after the rains and the *rec* as well as the tilapia were left flapping in the grass, it was our job as kids to collect up these fish and bring them home. It was a great time when people from different places gathered to collect *rec*.

We grew up fishing: it was part of our culture. As a Kumam child, you saw your elders fishing and you gradually just became part of it. Like cattle keeping, it was a young man's job. I was first given the task of holding the calves during milking, and looking after the calves. Watching the older boys graze the cattle, I learned from them and was eventually entrusted with taking the cattle out to graze.

Some of my earliest and fondest memories are of herding the cows down at the swamp, meeting the other boys in the area in rivalries and contests of strength. We followed our cows, and particularly our bulls, which were always on the lookout for cows from the other herds to mate with. I have such beautiful memories of moving with the cattle around our swamps. These movements set the scene for a lot of fighting, among bulls and likewise among boys. Particularly during the dry months, when boys from all the surrounding areas would come to our swamp in search of fresh, sweet grass for their cows, we would all move around and fight our battles. We were always seeking the best grass for our own cows, and prepared to defend our turf against interlopers.

We also didn't want other bulls to come and start mating with our cows. That is where many of the fights began, because the bulls

from the various kraals would start fighting and eventually you, the herders, would also start fighting. In that way, fighting was part of my growing up. Following our bulls, we young boys would get into wrestling contests, taking an opportunity to show our strength, and measure our strength against others. We boys were brought up to fight in order to show ourselves as leaders. Just as the bulls fight among themselves to establish dominance, we small, proud owners of the cattle wanted to test our mettle against one another. If your cow lost, you would say, 'Okay, mine has lost; now I'm going to show you – I'm going to beat you as a man.' We grew up wrestling; wrestling was a normal part of our lives.

You could see this in a bad light but, to be honest, I feel these experiences nurtured my fighting instinct, and prepared me to face difficult situations in my life. They also made me not accept that somebody else – bigger or wiser or stronger, or in a position of power – should always be telling me what to do. Obedience was never part of my mindset. I think herding cattle made me an independent person. Taking my lessons from these cattle-herding days, I have never been afraid to fight for my rights.

I lived my early childhood in our village in Olyanai, except when I went to school and stayed with my uncle Ekwamu. (Later, the long journeys that started during my secondary education at Holy Angels took me away from my village life.) But I well remember the times I stayed at home with my father and mother in our house on the dusty main road not far from the borehole. In addition to being a fisherman and a cattle trader, my father owned a small shop in the village, selling sugar, soap, cigarettes and other sundry items to the local community. His shop was near the few other small shops that comprised all the trade Olyanai had to offer.

With our small shop and our sizeable herd of cattle, our family was comparatively well-to-do in those days.

The mud-walled house we lived in, located just next to the Opungure Church of Uganda, is memorable mainly because one

night I almost died in it. The house had the modern improvement of an iron sheet roof. One night, two or three of us children were home alone when a heavy rainstorm swept through the town. The wind was so strong, and clattered the roof so violently, that we didn't feel safe there, and ran to the grass-thatched house behind it. That is what saved us, because the rain came, and that whole house – iron sheets and all – was ripped apart and destroyed in that storm. I believe that our decision to run to the grass-thatched house saved our lives.

The primary school where I started my baby class was just across the dusty road, and in the mornings I would run from home to class. I was lucky; some children had to walk very far to reach school. In those days we only started school at age 8 or 9. For those of us in the baby class, the classroom was the shady, dusty ground beneath a mango tree. There we sat and learned to scratch out our letters and numbers with a stick in the dust. It was a very strongly Christian, Protestant school, and we would be taken inside for prayers. The teachers would really cane us, even as kids. The Primary 2 students also caned us; when we made too much noise, the big boys would come and beat us to be quiet. In those days I wasn't particularly interested in learning; I went to school in order to play and to eat *posho* and beans. But it was at primary-school level that I got my first taste for rebellion against the teachers. They often came to the nearby homestead of my aunt Ajobo and because they caned us in school we didn't like to see them. I remember us sitting outside and abusing them, asking, 'Why are you coming to our village? Why are you coming to my auntie's home?'

For all that, being at school was wonderful; writing in the dust and also sometimes writing on our slates with chalk. As I travel on this journey I sometimes go to 'the school' and see my class: the two big mango trees under which I studied are still there! And then I also invariably remember Apany and Agezi – two classmates

who eventually married – and the time they were caught 'doing the thing' and were punished severely by the teachers.

In those days, my class had perhaps 20 children. It is such a stark contrast to what I see when I visit the same school today, where a single teacher struggles to cope with a class of 200. These children get no *posho* and beans at school. Nor are they being prepared for the future. In my day, even coming from a humble, rural school like this one, if you studied hard and performed well, you could become a doctor or a professor or a judge! That is not the reality for the children growing up in my village today.

So much of what made my childhood beautiful is now gone. The fish that we had several generations ago and which made my grandfather a comparatively wealthy man are now mostly depleted. The cows that once roamed here in abundant herds, the customary repository of our wealth, serving to weave together and strengthen the clan relationships through marriage bonds, were mostly rustled away in the insurgencies that gripped eastern Uganda and other parts of the country. That wealth has never been recovered. My family was one of the richest relatively in terms of cows. Now you don't see cows here.

These are some of the painful things I feel in my village. I feel that people are poorer now than they were many years ago. When I grew up, there was no famine in my home. We had cows, we had milk, and we had no malnutrition. Today, when droughts occur, I have to ferry food to make sure my people survive – I think I've gone through about four famines where I've literally had to transport food to Olyanai. I'm lucky that I've been working and had some resources to do it. There were many families that did not have that, and many people died of famine. And yes, this is a well-endowed country where food is concerned; the country is fertile and there really should be no hunger.

CHAPTER 2

MANGO TREES

I left home around the age of 10. My uncle Ekwamu (my father's youngest brother) got a posting in the civil service, as a subcounty clerk, in the town of Obulubulu about 60 kilometres away, and decided to take me to stay with him and attend school there. I revisited that school at Okile recently, and now the buildings are all new structures, even the church. In those days we had a big grass-thatched block of six classrooms. The reverend used to stay where those new houses are. Unfortunately, my new school was no longer across the road from where I slept; I had a gruelling 12-kilometre walk to get there.

A group of us children travelled together on foot, always racing to complete our daily round trip of 24 or so kilometres so as to either not be late for school, or not reach home after dark in the evenings. There was 'my young father' Epwonu (an older boy in my grandfather's extended family), and my friend Awada, a girl in my class. Epwonu was an athlete and would force us to run. He was very tough and would cane me if I did not run fast or wake up early enough. I was growing up and learning what was expected of me. With my friend Awada being a girl, I always made sure she was walking or running in front of me, and not behind me, because I was a man and so I had to protect her. In our culture, you never

let a woman or a girl walk behind you; a person or an animal might snatch her.

Another unfortunate feature of my new school was the large and bad-tempered mathematics teacher, who terrorised us children with his cane. He was a man from the Lango ethnic group, whose people live around Lira and are related to the Acholi group. He had a weeping leg ulcer, and it was almost impossible not to look at it. If he caught you looking, though, he would cane you mercilessly. Unfortunately for me, he also wielded his cane if you failed to call out the right answer to a mathematics problem in class. Mathematics was my worst subject.

My fear of mathematics, and of this teacher, led me on many occasions to escape to the one place I knew I could always find refuge and a sense of freedom: a mango tree.

Mango trees were a special feature of my childhood. Our compound in Olyanai is shaded with mango trees that have grown there for decades. Every homestead was dotted with mango trees, which sheltered us from the heat and were also an important source of food during the lean, dry months of May and June, when food became scarce but the new crops were not quite ready for harvesting. Mangoes were there for satisfying your hunger, and for survival if there was famine. As a young child, you needed to learn to climb the trees and pick those juicy ripe mangoes.

In this school, we would assemble under a tall, leafy mango tree not far off from the classrooms to eat our lunch of *posho* and beans, or for school assemblies. But there were other mango trees on the periphery of the school grounds, and to one in particular I would often escape from class with my friend Awada. For me, mango trees had other attributes: they were a vantage point; you could run away and climb up to see what was happening below. You could escape to a place of freedom and solitude. Hiding up in the leafy branches, you could see people walking below, but they wouldn't know you were there. Awada and I would climb high into

the branches, where we would remain invisible to those searching for us below. But my young father Epwonu always knew where to find us, and would often drag us back to class, our chins dripping with the juice of those mangoes, especially if it was the dry season.

I was an expert at finding and selecting mangoes. I used to climb in the trees, developing my sense of mangoes, perfecting my ability to see their qualities, judging from the shape, quality, colour and way their skin stretched – whether it stretched taut or puckered slightly – which ones would be sweet, ripe and juicy, and in which ones the flesh would still be a bit firmer and tarter. Just by looking at the mango I could get a sense of its taste, its quality. I think I still have a bit of that ability left in me.

And while I was eating one mango, my eye would always be searching the foliage above me to find the next. I think it's something you learn with time; first you will be able to tell the different stages of ripening, and then you will need to decide if you want the soft one, or one in that medium state, where it's a bit sour and the ripening is starting from the tip. You don't always wait for the mangoes to be fully ripe; you keep climbing and checking whether this one or that one is ready for eating. And the beauty – I keep telling colleagues here at Makerere and in the RUFORUM Secretariat, and indeed in the wider RUFORUM network – is that as you are eating one mango, your eye is not focused on the mango you are eating. You are focusing on the next mango. This is what I have been telling colleagues: 'Yes, you may have got this grant, but that should no longer be your focus, because it will soon be finished. What is the next opportunity? The next "mango"?'

Initially, I travelled back and forth between Obulubulu and Olyanai on the back of a bicycle pedalled by a relative of mine called Epolu. (One peculiar thing I remember about him is that he refused to use the pit latrines that were stationed along our route – instead he would go and relieve himself in the bush!) Later on, I took a bus, 'Ramtula', named after the Indian owner. The seats

were all reserved for elders so we children had to stand. It was especially exciting returning from Obulubulu and getting off the bus in my village, Olyanai; I knew there would be time now for roaming around my village with the cows, and travelling at night for dances.

After two terms at Okile Primary School (in Obulubulu subcounty), I escaped from the cruel mathematics teacher altogether, because my uncle was transferred to the subcounty offices in Kaberamaido. The new school, Alem Primary School, was a vast improvement: here we students still enjoyed our *posho* and beans but the teachers did not cane us. My performance in mathematics improved, as did my confidence. My mind had begun to open, and I started performing well academically, moving from being more or less the lowest performer in the class to being among the best. By the time I reached Primary 2 and Primary 3 I was always among the top three performers in the class.

At this school, however, the mango tree got me into trouble. The head teacher was Ameru Philemon Zephania. His wife (Ajuko Joyce Mary) was also a teacher in the school, and she was cruel! Their daughter, Tamali Iwiro, was in my class.

One day, Tamali Iwiro climbed up into the tree to get a mango. In those days, girls did not wear panties. I was looking up, and people saw me looking! I do not recall if I was looking for mangoes, or looking at the girl. But I was brought back to the assembly place and, in front of the entire school, was caned by the head teacher and his wife (the girl's parents) for looking at the girl.

I have remained good friends with one of the daughters, Martha Ameru. Even now we still laugh about the incident. She still says, 'What was *wrong* with you?' 'It was not wrong,' I respond, 'I was growing up!' Then she laughs and says, '*Do ida do* (You also)'. When a Kumam girl or woman talks like that to a man, you get the message – she is interested! We look at each other and imagine what could have been.

My stay at Alem Primary School was short-lived, for political reasons. The year was 1962, the same year Uganda gained independence from Britain and, while I was learning my sums in a grass-thatched house, unbeknown to me our new country was gearing up to hold its first national elections. In my little corner of the world, people's preoccupations had very little to do with the actual departure of our British overlords. Instead, there emerged a dividing line between the Catholics and the Protestants, and politics drove a nasty wedge between these two groups.

In my family, however, there was a contradiction. We were staunch Catholics, but we were also staunch supporters of the Protestant candidate, the Uganda People's Congress (UPC) leader Milton Obote, whom I am told had attended Kalaki Primary School nearby.

As a lone Catholic attending an overwhelmingly Protestant school, I had little idea of what lay in store for me as those election results were announced. I simply remember appearing at school one morning and there was jubilation in the air. Obote had won, and the Protestants were overjoyed.

Frankly I didn't comprehend what the election issues were. I didn't know what the political parties were. Also, I think I didn't recognise the divide: I had been baptised into the Catholic Church but during the election I was at an Anglican school. It was all adult stuff – I had no idea what the excitement was all about. I think the teachers must have been caught up in the euphoria of this election, and that must have come across to the kids, though, because the next morning, after the results were announced, everyone was shouting, 'We have defeated the Catholics!'

I still don't remember exactly how it all happened. I just remember the shouting and excitement. I imagine maybe a teacher asked if there were any Catholics in the class and I innocently put up my hand. I think the teacher might have slapped me. There was a lot of shouting in the classroom. That jubilation continued, while

in the neighbouring Catholic school the atmosphere must have been heavy indeed. I think I was probably the only Catholic in my class, and that is why all the slander fell on me. Egged on by the adults, the children pulled me outside the classroom, kicking me and jumping around me, pulling my shirt and taunting me with insults, saying, 'You stupid Catholics!' I went home crying, which of course upset my uncle. The next day he came to school and caused a scene. Soon after that, he sent me back to Olyanai, and instructed that I join the nearby school, Kakure Primary School, a Catholic school.

The scenes greeting me on my arrival back home in the village were bewildering; people at home were just as jubilant over Obote's victory as people at school had been! There was drinking, dancing and ululating. We have our particular Kumam way of dancing: you cut a cow's tail and put it on your arm and shake your arm up and down, with a bent elbow. It was all dancing and celebrating. My father, locally renowned for his dancing, was drinking and dancing. My mother was ululating. My grandfather slaughtered I-don't-know-how-many cows. The celebrations went on for several weeks, with everybody drinking and shouting and dancing.

I went from being the cowed dog to all this jubilation – all over the same candidate!

These scenes reflected the general happiness of my grandfather's home, where there were always people coming and going. As the chief, his role was to implement the policies of the then-governments: to make sure people paid their dues and dug the roads, and to make sure there was discipline and harmony within the community. I remember him always consulting and conferring with people, and people bringing their cases to him. Even after he left the chieftaincy he was a highly respected person. He would sit on the verandah, drinking millet brew, jiggling his legs up and down. He also had frequent meetings with his lieutenants, which kept us all very busy. There was always a lot of cooking, washing

of bicycles, and carrying of food, and there were chickens and cows to be slaughtered. We had to be very disciplined: you didn't talk when older people were talking, and you had to be ready to serve food. There was one man in particular, called Mr Engwedu (also a local chief), who often visited. And when he did, we knew a chicken or goat was going to be slaughtered – so we were very happy.

But living under my father's roof once more was not easy. While my mother was kind and gentle, he was the opposite. He was a difficult man, who often drank quite heavily, and I grew up fearing him. He was tough, and a disciplinarian. As soon as I got home from school, his orders and challenging questions would start flying at me. He was always pushing me to do this or that, demanding that I go and fetch water or perform some other task. By three o'clock in the morning, we were awake in the garden helping him with ploughing. He was not strong in academics, but he always insisted on discipline and hard work. After ploughing, he would set off to fish.

I think he was grooming me to become a trader like himself. I had to work in our shop and learn about selling things. But I was not a well-behaved boy. And unfortunately I did not develop any business acumen. Instead, I began to develop vices, smoking bitter tobacco. I used to steal cigarettes from my father's shop and smoke them. There was a particular brand that old women liked, called 'Ten', and that was the brand I liked. However, when you smoke it you feel confused, and many people used to take advantage of me; they would come and give me that cigarette to smoke so they could steal things from our shop.

Presumably in an attempt to teach me discipline and business acumen, my father even took me to stay with an Indian family at Kalaki, where I learned to eat and enjoy Indian food and say some words in the Gujarati language. This Indian family would also visit our home. Looking back, I think this helped me to appreciate cultural and ethnic diversity.

Good fortune did not last in my family. Sometime in 1963, the very same uncle Ekwamu who had taken me away with him to attend school was found to be stealing from the subcounty government. Always a sensualist – fond of food and drink and women – he had found his modest salary in the civil service inadequate to satisfy his appetites. It was a very painful time for our family, and particularly for my grandfather. But in this difficult time, I also saw the togetherness of my family. My father and his brother decided to sell their cows to release their brother from his debt. A hefty sum of money was needed, and we lost almost all our cows. I watched my father and his brother fall down in the dirt wailing and beating their chests as their herds of cattle were driven away. Even our shop was auctioned off.

That was the beginning of hard times for my family. Our comparative wealth was gone, and we were now reduced to the same levels of daily hardship as many others in our community had faced all along. At Kakure Primary School, raising the fees for my education became a struggle. None of my younger sisters followed me into the classroom. Where once food had been abundant, it now became scarce, especially during the dry months of May and June.

At Kakure, though, I found a new friend, a girl called Awalo. I was a class ahead of her, and the home she was staying in was midway to my home, about 3 kilometres away. She would always wait at the roadside so we could walk to school and come back from school together. We would run chasing each other or walk holding hands. We were quite a sight at school, with the other children and the teachers laughing at us. When they saw one of us alone, they would point to where the other was. I don't know what bonded us together but it was a beautiful friendship. When I left to study in Soroti, one of the teachers married her. And several years later, I met her in the bus park in Soroti and we ran towards each other and stopped and laughed for several minutes. 'A*wobi ni in*

ii Rwenyo tuai? Liame imoa da?' – literally translated as: 'You, boy, where did you disappear to? You never even once looked for me!' Oh, life can be interesting. Over the years, reflecting on my journey, I have vividly recalled this beautiful friendship.

At school, I continued to perform well. My class teacher, Mr Eperu from Anyara, was not from the area (Kakure) and spoke in very broken Kumam that made us laugh. Looking back on it, all our teachers at Kakure Primary School were good. They gave us confidence and inspired us to learn. My sweetest class was the final year, Primary 6. Our teacher, Mr Pius Epau, had a beautiful way of teaching mathematics and English. Preparing for our exams, he would have us sing out in class. He would come walking along the rows to make sure each student was answering the question, and then he would take us outside for a break to run in the field before returning to class. Mr Epau was also a teacher who would push the entire class, and prepare us for the exam. Our class was a lot of fun. He was a unique teacher: we loved mathematics and had no fear of it; and we loved English. It really was a magnificent class.

Mr Epau's teaching continued to inspire me nearly 20 years later, when I joined the teaching staff at Makerere University. He made me realise how you can develop your students and inspire them with a love of your subject. I believe every student is capable of performing well; students just need to be given encouragement and a sense of direction: 'What are your strengths? Which are your weak areas you need to address?' Looking back, I think being with Mr Epau was probably one of the biggest change moments in my life. He was inspiring, and I recognised this all the more when I went to university and encountered another teacher who inspired me similarly with his love of mycology. These two teachers, in particular, have inspired both my own self-beliefs about my weaknesses, strengths and capacity to learn and improve, and my own teaching practice – trying to make it interesting, keep students engaged, and give them the confidence to believe they can perform

and do well. So, the lessons of these teachers have been invaluable in my career, including during the RUFORUM years!

Those same teachers continued to inspire me further over the years, as my wife and I returned to my village and helped to establish and support some of our local primary and secondary schools. Looking back, I see how Mr Epau and the other teachers from Kakure Primary School built us up as students and gave us confidence. For instance, they encouraged us to debate and to speak English. During local football matches, we kids would be challenging each other and debating, practising our English. It must have been pretty broken English – but we were all learning to develop a view of the world and argue with one another about that. This is what we so sorely need in my community today!

CHAPTER 3

WARAGI AND WITCHCRAFT

I was raised in the Catholic Church, but my faith did not last. My childhood Sundays were defined by the long walk, some 18 kilometres, to Lwala Mission, a pretty brick church with stained-glass windows that was built around 1917. I remember arriving at church, my legs aching and my belly growling, but all that effort being forgotten as soon as the transcendent melodies and harmonies of the hymns filled my ears. I was chased away from the choir because I can't carry a tune, but I did love listening to them sing.

When I was probably somewhere between the ages of 10 and 12, the time came for me to prepare for my confirmation in the church. It was a momentous time of life, and I felt on the cusp of maturity. I was to be confirmed as a baptised child of God. During this period, I would walk daily to Lwala Church to get coaching from the priest, Father *'Okwichi'* – a Dutchman by the real name of Van de Hag, who was much loved in Kaberamaido and was given a Kuman name that referred to his squinty blue eyes. He became totally integrated into the society: he enthusiastically drank *kongo ting* and ate *boyo* (pasted cowpea leaves).

Having gone through the entire process of confirmation, I was supposed to be given a Bible. Unfortunately, on the day that Father 'Okwichi' was handing out Bibles to those confirmed, I could not

be there. I don't recall why, but there must have been something important keeping me from attending an occasion I had long been anticipating – being presented with my very own Bible!

Returning for mass the following Sunday, I had my holy communion, and then asked the father for my Bible. He would not give it to me because I had not been there on the appointed day. I don't remember the circumstances, but Father 'Okwichi's' refusal left me bitter. How could a person of God deny a child who had worked so hard and been so dedicated? I have never forgiven the Catholic Church for that.

I think this was the beginning of my confrontation with that formidable institution. Whenever I pass around Lwala, my mind goes back to Okwichi and the Bible he refused to give me!

Apart from this unfortunate incident, I was growing up generally as a happy child, exploring our surroundings and looking after our cattle. In the early parts of the year, once the rains had come, there would be a lot of digging and tending of crops intermingled with journeys to school. The heavy rains of April and May also heralded the time for fishing, *rec omol*. The fish would swarm in our waters, and then the masses of people would come from various places to harvest fish. *And the place would become very smelly!* Then, as the year progressed, the waters would also gradually recede, until the arrival of the dry months – December to mid-March.

For the youngsters, December was one of the best times of the year. We had no school and little work to do, except for sorting out cotton to sell to the ginneries and get money for our Christmas clothing and feasts. The old grasses would be burnt and sweet new grass had not yet emerged for the cows to feed on. Searching for pastures, the youngsters would have to take the cattle along the swamp fringes, often travelling quite far up and down. This was the time for fighting and wrestling down at the swamp!

And, in the evenings, we youngsters would travel with our sisters to different places for dancing. Musicians would play the

Okembe, our local instrument (a 'thumb piano'), and we were always on the lookout for partners. Boys had to keep a close watch over their sisters; we wanted serious courting only, in order to get cows for our own marriages. In later years, the Okembe became less common and was replaced by gramophone music. Then we danced rumbas and enjoyed Congolese Lingala music.

In my late youth, when I was already in Senior 4 at Namilyango, two of my sisters died of measles in the same week, and a third sister a week later. My family believed that our neighbours had cursed our houses to bring about this tragedy. So my grandfather asked my father to move to another place, a mile away from my father's home where my sisters had died. My grandfather (Ibrahim Eyadu) had a lot of land, and gave my father a piece that was adjacent to the swamp at Agule, where he could move with his herd of more than 100 cows. My father had rebuilt his herd by then through the cows given by his father (Eyadu) and those that he had kept with other relatives and friends, a common practice in Kuman culture. My father then hired herders from western Uganda (Banyankole/Banyarwanda) to look after the cows. I recall those herders vividly: they would live in small, grass-thatched huts near the cattle kraal. The men, who walked with sticks and spears, herded the animals, while the wives and children looked after calves and did the milking and would also sell *mo dyang* (cow butter). They would give us *chak* (sour milk from cows), which we would gulp in the morning with *kwon* (millet bread) or *kata* (fresh potato) or *amukeke* (dry potato). It was very nutritious feeding and served for breakfast.

The herder men were often tall and thin, while the women had very fat buttocks with light and smooth skins; they were very beautiful women. I remember my father telling me, 'Your mother is a very bad woman: I wanted to marry *Adir* [slang for Munyankole/Munyarwanda] to be your mother...Anyway, she produced you – and she cares very well for the family!' And some years later he

chased away two women (on separate occasions) – one Acholi and one Jonam – whom his younger brother Ekwamu had brought to marry as second wives. 'What do they have that Lucy [the first wife] doesn't have?' he asked his brother, and used a big stick to chase the two women away!

The cattle herders had children and, being children, we did not see any barriers between them and us, although sometimes we complained that the flies swarmed around them because they handled milk all day long. They helped me to learn techniques of milking, and we would even have milking competitions.

But we woke up one morning and they had disappeared. I don't know where they went! They were very mobile people, always on the lookout for people with many cows.

So my father had to look for other herders and he brought in a Karamojong family. What I recall is that the Karamojong herder came with a young boy and a daughter, and the daughter was renamed 'Atim', my mother's name. They integrated into our family well, and even learned to dig crops. I still recall that beautiful and very proud Karamojong girl – and even today I still admire their beauty, pride and elegance. When I look at my two daughters, Polina and Nagujja (my daughter from another woman whom I named after my late wife Nagujja), I see that beautiful Karamojong girl. I don't recall when they left us, but it was probably around the start of the insurgency, when they must have feared for their lives. How I wish I could know where the two youngsters are or if they are still alive.

During this later part of my childhood, I also came across my childhood friend Awada, who had fled to the mango tree with me all those years ago to escape the belligerent mathematics teacher and his cane. She was brought to the dance by another childhood friend of mine from Apokor village, Emaju (a teacher who was later murdered by NRM soldiers in Serere). Awada recognised me and came to dance with me several times. We enjoyed our reunion

and I can still hear her saying several times, *'Do ida! In pwodi wi rac'* – literally meaning, 'Are you still stubborn?' But I don't know where she is now, whether she is still alive. As I walk this long journey and the sun begins to set, I must rush, albeit more slowly than in my younger years, to look for her – or, if she is dead, to find her resting place.

And how can I forget the beautiful Lango woman, Amiroit, in my village. She was called 'Akello Kosi', and was married in the same 'home' family of Mzei Okim, where my sister Adego is married. The woman died several years back, during the insurgency, and I was not able to bury her. For me, as a child, she was the most beautiful – a perfect – woman in our village. I don't know precisely what I saw in her but the overall impression was of great beauty, elegance and respectability. She was not tall; in fact, she was quite short. She was neither fat nor thin but 'plump', like many Langi girls and women, just like that beautiful juicy mango. And she would talk Kuman with that voice and accent of a Lango woman, beautiful and romantic. No wonder, as I grew up, I really wanted to marry a Lango woman – although it was not to be.

But I get ahead of myself! As my schooling continued after leaving Kakure Primary, we became poorer and poorer as a family. My learning was financed by three great women from my clan who helped me create a future for myself. My mother, Polina Atim, earned money from farming and also made and sold *waragi* (home brew). My 'auntie' Ada Adongo, an excellent farmer, sold her produce. And a third woman, Imata Amayo, a wife of my father's brother Ogonga (from my grandfather Eyadu's extended family), contributed some of the proceeds from her practice in witchcraft (she was a renowned witchdoctor in our community) towards my education. Two of these women, Imata Amayo and my mother, Polina Atim, sadly never lived to see the fruits of their labour. But thanks to God, I still have Ada with me; though having now lived 100 years, she grows weaker by the day.

I only recently found out why Imata Amayo, the witchdoctor, was so supportive of my education. She was from the same house (door) where cows for marrying my mother had come from. Therefore, I was her child and part of her lineage! How blind I have been for much of my life, not examining the happenings around me. It pains me sometimes that I know so little about my people, our culture and the things that bind and bond us. These days, young people from my village marry using their own monies, sometimes paying the bride price in cash and not cows. I did this myself when I married my wife. What a loss to our society and heritage! Cows once served to weave strong and intricate bonds between our people – but now the cows are gone, the close bonds of our society are weakened, and young people remain ignorant of our culture and our values. I sometimes wonder why we have sacrificed so much for modernity. The Indians and the Japanese have developed without losing their heritage and societal values. Why does it so often seem that we have lost ours?

I was lucky that my mother, especially, had such a strong belief in education. Her family was relatively well educated, but she herself did not study beyond Primary 3. As is unfortunately typical in Ugandan society, her family decided she should leave school and get married. Her parents and my father's parents arranged it between them that my father and mother, Boniface Edimu and Polina Atim, would marry. My father was regarded as quite a good catch: a good dancer and athlete, and the son of a chief. And then, so was she: a kind, intelligent and hardworking woman.

My maternal grandfather and grandmother took me, as a child, to their kraal to show me 'Ayoko' – one of the cows my paternal grandfather had paid as part of the 22 cows paid as bride price for my mother!

Leaving Kakure Primary School with brilliant results, I was selected for and had the privilege of attending one of the best schools in the region for my junior secondary school: the Holy Angels College in Madera, Soroti.

Nowadays the school is in a very dilapidated state, a casualty of the insurgencies that hit the area during the 1990s and early 2000s. Some of the mango trees are no more. Both the dormitory where I used to stay and part of my class were shot up with bullet holes, as the place became both a site of battles and a camp for internally displaced people seeking refuge from the conflicts.

Unfortunately, in my day, in a different sense, it was also a school of terror: I suffered heavily from bullying at this school. As newcomers to the school, we were tortured by the class ahead of us, who had been subjected to the same treatment when they had joined the school, and were continuing in the same vein. I was victimised more than others, because I looked like an older boy, another Kumam student, who was a particular bully, and some of the students thought I was his brother. This was a frightful part of my schooling.

In my dormitory, they would tie bedsheets or blankets and put a stone in the middle – and then start beating you: *'Omujas, omujas [freshers]!'* The big boys would goad the smaller boys into carrying out most of the acts of torture, and if you tried to retaliate against these smaller boys, you would have to reckon with the big boys. I found it an irony that this school was called 'Holy Angels', implying that we all should have been living in peace and harmony. We had priests, fathers, all over the place but they could not keep the discipline in the school.

One of the most frightful deeds happened at breakfast time. Breakfast was maize porridge with a rather runny consistency, served up in round glass bowls. Once you were served your porridge, the smaller boys would run up to you and tip the contents of your breakfast bowl into theirs. I spent more than two weeks without having breakfast, because every morning at breakfast these small boys sent by the older boys would come and turn my bowl over and take my porridge.

After two or three weeks of losing my breakfast in this manner

every morning, I just couldn't stand it any longer. One morning, holding my empty breakfast bowl for what I vowed would be the last time, those fighting instincts from back in the swamp rose in me, and I seized the young boy who had just made off with my porridge by the neck and wrestled him to the ground. Of course, that was a big mistake. In an instant, all the larger boys piled onto me, stepping and pounding on my back as I held this boy firmly by the neck, almost trying to strangle him.

Finally, the boys pulled me off this youngster and took me to the head teacher, a priest, saying, 'He's a troublemaker, he's been fighting and beating another boy.' The priest believed their story and decided to suspend me for two weeks. And when I was allowed back in school, I was given a big garden in the compound to dig as further punishment.

This incident only hardened my rebellion against the Catholic Church. I felt that nobody had listened to my side of the story, and that I had been treated unfairly. And there were many similar incidents. It was a great irony that this place was being run by the Catholic priests and yet they allowed so much torture, so much bullying. I don't recall ever seeing or feeling that justice had been carried out in the school.

From then on, I decided to take matters into my own hands, And, for that, I found the mango tree offered an ideal staging place.

After dark, as everybody was busy with reading time, I climbed stealthily up into the cool branches of the mango tree. I watched the pathway below, and waited. As one of my tormentors walked along the pathway by himself, I jumped down on him from above and started pummeling him. 'You keep quiet about this!' I told him. And he did, knowing that if he reported the incident to anyone, I would again be waiting for him. Lying in wait in the mango tree, I think I must have visited retribution on six or seven other boys. Much later on, I was reminded of the movie *Tarzan*, where this man lived by jumping from tree to tree. That is the way I lived in school.

The fighting tactics I learned from growing up in my village helped me survive; I was brought up to fight and survive.

At Holy Angels, there were no proper bathrooms; we all used to bathe naked together outside, behind a cement wall. The older boys of course forced us younger boys to carry water for them; the small boys would come and tell you to fetch water, and if you refused the bigger boys would come along and beat you. What I remember about this school is really the bullying in the dormitory, beating you (*omujas*) all in a row, one of the big boys egging the small boys on to start beating you. It was horrifying. It was torture.

I have since met some of those schoolboys who tortured me, and we laugh about it. One of them tells me, 'You beat me very badly, you almost killed me and now you're a professor! You're a very bad man.' Looking back on it, Holy Angels prepared me well for dealing with challenges and surviving in a hostile environment.

As much as I had a hard time with bullying, academically I thrived at Holy Angels. The education was excellent, and I was prepared to suffer for that quality education, especially knowing what my mother, Ada and Imata Amayo were sacrificing to keep me there. I was not at home most of the time, so to an extent I was sheltered from how difficult things were in the village. But my sisters all recall that my mother would toss and turn with worry if she received one of my letters asking for money. She frequently went to her brothers asking for help with school fees and expenses.

I found strength in not wanting to let my parents down. Also, when it came to academics, everyone at that school was serious about maintaining the standards. Those with good grades were more or less sure of going to the best schools in the country, and after that perhaps even to Makerere University, that shining beacon of education and opportunity in our country!

I was very inspired one day when a boy (Eilu) who had formerly studied at Holy Angels came back to visit and told us about this beautiful school, the best in the country, and a boxing school: Namilyango College. As soon as I heard the name, my mind was made up; I wanted to go there too.

Namilyango College was one of the best secondary schools in the country. But before I reached its hallowed halls, I had one more experience at Holy Angels that I cannot forget. We would fetch water from a borehole at the school. Even the teachers and their families did so. Often, at the borehole, we would see a young girl coming to fetch water who drove us all wild. I still remember her dark brown skin and the pointed things growing in her chest. Sometimes those things would get exposed and this just got us wilder. She was that ripening mango. Oh, she was a beauty! Many of the boys, especially the bigger ones, would vie for her attention and try to pump water for her.

I knew the teacher she was staying with, a Kumam, and one day I found the courage to ask the girl where she came from.

'*Do ida?* Why do you ask? Of course, I come from Ousia, near Otuboi.'

'Aha! That is the village of my auntie Awa Amongo!'

'And where do you come from yourself?'

'I come from Olyanai!'

'Oh, that is the place of *rec* – I want to eat *rec*!'

Emboldened by our exchange, I boasted about the fish in my village, and teasingly invited her to come and eat fish with me. 'Olyanai is the most beautiful place on earth,' I told her. And she said, 'Maybe someday, when I get a person to take me there, I will come!'

Around four or five years later, the son of Edimu kept his promise! I went looking for the girl, whose name was Jane Apila, and invited her once more to come to Olyanai.

By then I was in my Senior 4 class at Namilyango, and the

terrible tragedy I have already mentioned had befallen my family – the measles epidemic in my village that carried off two of my young sisters on the same day with a third dying a week later. I particularly remember the grief of my mother and Ada Akello. In those days, people believed that such a tragedy could only have been brought about by witchcraft. According to Ada, people in the village had ganged up to kill her house – *okeko mere* – those related to her and the ones she had married for. '*Atina* (my child),' she said, 'they have killed *okeko na* (my house, my family); they will be coming for you and your father; wait and see!'

In my society, when a person dies the immediate thinking is that somebody has connived and used witchcraft to kill or finish off that person. This was a very tough time for my family. I can still see the scene, with my remaining sisters gathered around my mother and my other grandmothers, everyone weeping. On the other verandah sat my father, alone, jiggling his legs up and down.

As things settled, and I returned to the village after my Senior 4 exams, I remembered that girl I had met in Soroti at Holy Angels some four years previously. I decided to make a trip to Ousia, to my aunt Amongo's home. I suspected Jane Apila would be there since this was the end of the year and Christmas was coming. So I took the two-hour bicycle journey. My cousin Asana received me, and I took him aside and explained why I had come. He didn't say much. He disappeared for about half an hour and then came back with somebody walking behind him. And then, there she was: even more beautiful. She was now grown and 'ripe'. My cousin looked at me and just smiled. She greeted me and said, 'Oh, it is you! Where did you disappear to?' Without giving me a chance to answer she went into the kitchen to cook. We stayed together long into the evening, and she then left to go home. The next day she came back and cooked once again.

There were many curious eyes looking at this suitor who wanted to take their daughter/sister away. On the third day, I told her '*rec*

omol – the fish have come – and they are swimming all over the place; you can come to our home and not only catch *rec* but also eat as much as you want. You told me in Madera you wanted to come to eat *rec* at our place!' When she asked where she'd stay, I told her that of course she would stay in my home. 'I have a beautiful house,' I said (referring to my grass-thatched house). After several negatives, she told me she might indeed visit. And so I left for Olyanai, not so sure but very hopeful. But I left behind a very able emissary, my cousin Asana, the son of Amongo.

Some two weeks later, I got a big surprise. I was called from my grandfather Eyadu's home, where I had my grass-thatched house near the house of Ada Akello, and told that I had visitors. When I got to my parents' house, I saw my cousin Asana sitting on the verandah and looking very happy to see me. My sisters were moving around excitedly, jumping up and down. I didn't know why. Then a young woman walked out of the kitchen, where she was already cooking together with my mother! Oh my God! Jane Apila! She came! I looked at my cousin and he burst out laughing.

As the sun set, my cousin got on his bicycle, purportedly to go to the home of my other grandfather, Mika Euchu, leaving the young woman behind with me! We stayed together for over a week, with women coming to see this girl that the son of Edimu had brought to introduce to them for marriage. It was a beautiful time. It removed some of the sadness we had been feeling, because we had 'some replacement for my dead sisters'. Moreover, because I was the only boy in our household, Ada and my sisters were all keen to see me married; all those cows – 'You must bring a woman to our house!' I had become a man!

The happiness was short-lived! A few days later, my cousin from Ousia came back to our home with four young men, each riding a bicycle. We welcomed them. But the 'visitors', with the exception of my cousin Asana, were not in the mood for any friendly gesture. If I recall correctly, one or two of them threw their bicycles down,

and they started pacing around with very vindictive faces. They immediately asked where the girl was. This was not surprising in our culture; we expected them to come and demand a fine from us for my elopement with their sister.

My father and the others pleaded with them, 'Let's talk. We can sort out this issue.' My frightened love came out of the kitchen, holding on to my mother, and immediately they started abusing her: 'You want to kill us? How can you come to this home where people die like insects? You want to bring medicine and disease to finish us off! You don't know how witchcraft from this home recently turned on them and killed their children!'

It was so painful to my family, hearing such words. Even my cousin wept because those dead girls had been his 'sisters' also. The visitors grabbed Jane Apila and forcibly removed her, riding away with her. My family and I watched on helplessly. And that was it. Gone. The last time I saw my childhood love, the girl I wanted to be my wife.

But wait! I have been travelling for long. I am growing tired and my memory and sight are becoming blurred. The road is bumpy and misty...I see ahead this girl at the borehole beckoning to me. Then she runs away, and I see her on the verandah with my mother, playing with my sisters. I am trying to recall who she is. Who is this beautiful girl? Oh, I am getting confused. Let me continue with my journey...

CHAPTER 4

NAMILYANGO

As I grew up and pursued the educational opportunities that opened to me, I gradually became separated from the old village ways of life. Education opened many doors for me, but it also took me away from the world I had grown up in.

Going to Namilyango College, just outside of Kampala, was a significant marker of that process, when my life really started to shift as I approached manhood. I had never travelled outside my district before. It was a long journey, and my mother came with me, determined that I should have everything I needed for the start of senior secondary school. My uncle, my mother's brother Egweu Sira, who was working as Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Local Government in Kampala, came and fetched us from Olyanai in his pickup truck. He and his brothers and their families respected and loved my mother, so he had to take his sister's child to school – that great school, Namilyango.

Today, I think of my mother, and all those uncomfortable hours she spent sitting in the back of that pickup truck, traversing the country to take her son to school. How do we ever thank our mothers for their sacrifices? My father was happy enough to leave the burden of my education to her. I know my story is not unique. We left home barefoot, but she had bought me a pair of black leather shoes – my first shoes ever – which she kept in her handbag.

Arriving at Namilyango College, my first impressions of the place were of wonder and terror in about equal measure. Coming from the flat, semi-arid savannahs of the east, I encountered a curious landscape of green hills, banana trees and dense forests. The school was situated near the top of a hill, surrounded by thick forests, over which a cold mist often settled in the evenings to remain through the late morning. As we climbed the hill in my uncle's truck, watching the mists floating over the forest, I thought we must be getting close to heaven, almost ready to touch the clouds and the sky.

I was a foreigner in a foreign place: pressed into a starched white shirt, with the constraining noose of a necktie knotted around my throat. I wore those brand-new shoes, and marvelled at how strange and rigid they felt on my feet, the narrow, pointy tips awkwardly constraining the spread of my toes. I had never before owned anything as precious as those shoes. But I was not yet comfortable wearing them.

Jumping off the back of the truck and gazing up at the imposing brick facade of the main school building – the grandeur of its columns and wide front stairs, where some of the other boys were congregated, watching the new arrivals – I was assailed by the memories of fighting, torture and survival of Holy Angels. I felt frightened: was this really the place I had travelled so far and worked so hard to come to? After a moment of utter alienation, I became calm again, secure in the knowledge that whatever new challenges awaited me here, I could always fight. Or flee. But not with these clumsy, awkward shoes on.

Without thinking, I bent down, removed my shoes and tucked them into my square wooden suitcase, where all my belongings in the world were stashed. I was already looking around me for escape routes. Fight or flight: it was a very familiar response. And in this uncertain new context, it brought me back to life. In my culture, you were trained to be a brave man. You were trained

to survive, and I knew the survival instinct was strong in me. I thought: I can manage myself. Lifting my suitcase onto my head, I stepped towards the school building, watching my uncle's vehicle pull away.

A chorus of jeering erupted from my fellow students, whose eyes were all fixed on me. They chanted: *'Malo, Malo, Mudokolo!'* These were the Baganda words for 'backward', 'primitive'. I was a real villager, coming barefoot into the school and carrying a suitcase on my head instead of lifting it by its handle. Even now my ex-classmates laugh at me: 'You had never even seen shoes! You had not seen a bathroom!'

Having run the gauntlet of hostile students, I finally settled into my dormitory, Campling. Thus came the next shock. I wanted to bathe, but I'd never seen a modern bathroom before. I entered the washrooms and found a cubicle where water was pooled in some strange sort of white porcelain standpipe. It was very clean, so I actually undressed and got ready to take a shower. Then I stood there puzzled for quite a few minutes, trying to work out how I was meant to get the water from the pan to my body. Little did I know I was actually trying to bathe in a toilet!

I heard the footsteps of another student coming past my cubicle, and that is what saved me. A moment later, I could hear the water splashing down, so I took my clothes and my new towel to where the sound was coming from – and that is how I found the real bathing place! When I later told this to my friends, my classmates, they would just say *'malo, malo'* – the backwardness, the primitiveness.

Things did not get better for me that first evening in the dining hall. At each meal, one or two students per table would be selected to serve the food. Because I had created such a scene that day, of course I was picked. Of course I was still barefoot. Everyone wanted to see my naked feet. As I walked back and forth, carrying plates around the dining hall, everybody was laughing and clapping, clapping, clapping, '*Malo*, give me food!' The second-year students (called

'*kamwakas*') were particularly ruthless; remembering how they had been picked on as first-years, they were now eager for payback. Other boys sitting at other tables should also have got up to serve food. But not that night. I was made to serve food to the entire dining hall, everyone watching me tread back and forth with my bare feet!

The novelties of my new environment at Namilyango continued to strike me. The climate was much colder than I was used to. I had arrived on campus without a jersey, and suffered for that whole first term. It was a deep, penetrating cold, like nothing I had ever felt before.

I had never seen a pig, and was shocked to find these animals occasionally running around the school grounds. And the forest frightened me, because I thought there must be hyenas around, as they frequently were in rocky, tree-covered areas at home. I remembered growing up and being told: 'Child, don't cry, or a hyena will come and eat you!' I thought there must be hyenas all over the place.

The language and culture was different, and so were the people. At home, we are tall and dark. Here, in Buganda, people were short and plump. The Buganda language sounded so strange to my ears. But also, some of our teachers were white Europeans, from places I had never heard of, like Ireland. And I met with Muslim people for the first time. The food also took a lot of getting used to: the green cooking bananas, the *matoke*. To us, this was not food, and the first day I didn't eat at all.

Academically, Namilyango was one of the top three schools in the country, and it was a great honour and privilege to be there. I attended Namilyango from 1967 until 1972. Even the priests who had great problems with me at Holy Angels agreed with and supported my choice to go to Namilyango. 'It will make you a better person,' they said. Founded in 1902, it was a very strong Catholic school, headed by Father Bernard Kuipers, and mass and prayers were always woven into daily life.

Above all, Namilyango was a boxing school. This too was new to me. Boxing was ingrained in the culture of this school. On the first Friday and Saturday after my arrival, it was ritual that all of us new students would be taken to the boxing hall. We were each given gloves and paired off with an opponent. Whether we had boxed before or not, this was the time to learn. Even the priests took part in boxing. Some of Uganda's early boxers, the Olympic champions Nyangweso and Kawere, were Namilyango boys. I, too, took on boxing, until I was later introduced to rugby and that became my sport.

Notwithstanding all the raucous teasing I endured on my arrival, Namilyango did not have anything approaching the levels of fighting and bullying that went on at Holy Angels. I had come prepared for the worst, but there were only a few occasions when I had to call on my old fighting skills. Because I had started off school as a laughing stock, there was one boy in second year who kept pulling my hair and taunting me. After several rounds of hair-pulling, I fought back. The mistake I made, however, was to try boxing with him. He gave me blows that really hurt, and was very proud of the thrashing he had given me. Before that fight was over, I had already made up my mind: I would deal with him later, in my own way.

He was living in Biermans, a dormitory near mine. One day, I waylaid him as he walked up the steps to go to class. I wrestled him down, just as we wrestle cows down in my village when we are going to slaughter them! Once again, those Kumam-Karamojong skills came in handy. I beat him and nearly strangled him. 'Don't talk!' I said. And he never did.

There were several other occasions, with other antagonists. Holy Angels had made me tough and even here people got to know that I would fight: that *Mudokolo*, that primitive man, will behave as a primitive man, and fight!

We slept in metal-framed bunk beds, which had the particular feature of being quite springy. Sleeping in the top bunk, I was

exposed to another common prank. As I lay sleeping, the big boys would come up and hit the underside of my bed, causing me to catapult out of it and slam down hard onto the concrete floor.

On one of those occasions, a student called Walugembe tossed me out of bed, and I fell down very badly. He was not big, and I was determined to have payback. I waylaid him and beat him very, very badly. He went to the priest crying that I had beaten him. The priest came and asked me if I had indeed beaten up Walugembe. I replied that I had, because he had dropped me from my bed. I was not punished. The priest told us to shake hands and become friends. But because I had given Walugembe such a thrashing, he went to this very large student, a big Muganda boxer called Waswa, and had him take me on. That man came up and started to slap me in the dormitory. Other students shouted at me to run, because they knew the boxer would keep beating me up. So that is what I did. I ran and had to jump through an open window to escape this big boxer. As I ran towards the chapel, I saw a pile of stones and stopped. I am a Kumam-Karamojong, and we don't run away from fights! I picked up two stones, one in each hand, and walked back towards the dormitory. The students saw me coming back, holding the stones, with tears running down my face, and it was their turn – Waswa as well – to run. One student rushed off and fetched the priest, who came quickly and held me back to pacify me. After I had cooled down, he went to talk to my dormitory mates and those in Biermans house, in order to keep the peace. He returned with my bunkmate, a boy called Nkajja, and asked him to take me back to the dormitory.

Fortunately for me, Nkajja was a very kind young man, and we became close friends. I suffered a lot from that common prank of being tossed out of bed, but Nkajja saved me from this torture by letting me share his bed. This act of kindness cemented our friendship, and we became strongly bonded. As a somewhat worldlier Muganda, from the central region, he would laugh at my country mannerisms, such as the way I introduced myself – 'I'm

Ekwamu, from Kaberamaido. I'm a Kumam. I'm a cattle-keeper' – and the way I said these words with such pride, having no sense that they marked me out as a lowly, backward sort of person. He also liked to remind me of how I had once tried to bathe in a toilet. But he was never mean-spirited. On the contrary, I remember his gentleness and his humility. He would tap me on the shoulder sometimes to remind me to put my shoes on. Nkajja was a gifted bass guitar player, and joined the school band. Watching him play made me proud and brought me even closer to him. He was a great guitar player. He was a great friend.

I had another episode in Senior 3 that was to change things for me at Namilyango. After night classes, I went to visit some friends in Doyle house, one of the storeyed dormitories. The dormitory is next to Campling, my own dormitory. When the time came for switching off the lights for sleeping, I was still there talking and laughing with my friends. The dormitory prefect, a big and very strong young man from South Sudan or Acholi, came and grabbed me by the neck and pulled me down the stairs, beating me. The commotion brought out the students from four dormitories – Campling, Biermans, Doyle and McKee – to watch the beating of this *Mudokolo*.

When the prefect released me I noticed he was in his nightgown, with his big testicles dangling out. I immediately jumped at him and got hold of those big testicles and hung onto them and squeezed for dear life. Thanks to my training in Olyanai, I knew I had got him in the right place, the point of weakness for every man! In no time at all he started wailing. But I did not leave off. I kept squeezing. As usual the students ran to the house of the priest, who came and pleaded with me to release the prefect. Reluctantly, I let go of him, he collapsed on the ground, and I went back to my dormitory. Everybody in the school was roaring about how the tiny *Mudokolo* had put down the big bully.

After this event, the school decided to identify all the stubborn students in Year 3 and Year 4. We were put into another dormitory,

Hanlon, under the watchful eye of another priest. I got separated from my friend Nkajja.

Despite these episodes, overall bullying at Namilyango was minimal. We did have a lot of tribal jokes, though, reflecting our cosmopolitan environment, in which black and Asian students from all different parts of the country mixed together. Jaluo were people from the north of Kenya. Omunyolo, people from Bunyoro, were arch enemies of the Baganda in central Uganda. The Baganda became friends of the British and used this to beat Banyoro and take land from them. These issues had haunted the government of Milton Obote and broken his relations with the *Kabaka* (king) of Muganda. 'As stupid as a *Munyolo*!' That was the kind of abusive language used in the school against non-Baganda. The Banyoro were people from western Uganda, backward people, who had been defeated during the British times by the Buganda. Those of us with dark black skin were called either *'Badokolo'* or *'Munyolo'* or *'Jaluo'*. These insults were always bandied about in a light-hearted manner, but they also indicated the deep-seated divides among the various ethnic groups in Uganda.

I came to Namilyango with good grades, but I didn't perform well during the first year. So when the school decided to divide students based on their performance, I was moved from Class 1A to Class 1C, for the weaker students. I think I had become nervous and intimidated; when the teacher asked a question in class, the hands of other students, especially Indian students, would shoot up immediately to answer. I think this was partly cultural: in my conservative rural community, one would feel scared of speaking out, even if one knew the answer. But I was also not used to being among such quick thinkers, and I felt stupid. My own mind seemed to work more slowly.

Unfortunately, the students in Class 1C were not given the same level of attention as the other classes. From that first year up to Senior 4, for example, we had 38 different mathematics teachers.

But unknown to the teachers, this motivated my classmates and me to work extra hard. We helped and supported one another. We bonded very strongly. Bearing in mind that we were put together as the weakest class, we had a very high pressure to perform – to prove to ourselves and the rest of the school that we were every bit as capable as anyone else.

As we approached Senior 4, we braced ourselves for taking our O Levels: the Cambridge Secondary School Leaving Exams, run across the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth countries. In preparation, we calculated what subject combinations and teachers could help us to perform best. In my case, I dropped French and went for Fine Art instead – a decision I have since always regretted. And I refused to take the Christian Religious Education class that was taught by one of the priests, because I did not trust the quality of his teaching, and insisted on taking the same course with a different priest (Father Sweeny).

I had continued to wage my battle against the Catholic Church, running to the forest to escape from morning prayers and mass. For some reason, Father Kuipers accepted my stubbornness, and I was the only person in the school who was allowed to skip these daily rituals. I think they looked at me as a problematic child – 'The devil is disturbing this kid'. I think they felt there was something spiritually wrong with me, disturbing me. And of course the Lord needed to help this young man.

But I was also hardworking, and motivated. If I ever faltered, I just had to remember my mother brewing *waragi* so I could be there. If I failed, I would be failing her. I think being part of this self-motivated class helped me a lot. We worked hard because we were disadvantaged. But we were also stubborn, and when you bring stubborn people together, they start managing themselves. I think that is what we did in this class. We worked together in a group to help one another pass; when somebody had mastered a particular subject area, they would share that knowledge with all of us.

The subject that I loved the most was African literature. I devoured every book I could get my hands on that came from an African writer. Of course we read Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, *The River Between* by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, the Kenyan writer, *Song of Lawino* by Okot p'Bitek, the Ugandan writer, *The Lion and the Jewel* by Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian writer, and *Mission to Kala*, by the Cameroonian author Mongo Beti. Reading Achebe, you could see that oratory skill and the leadership in the village, and the sense of humour in it. And of course, as young men becoming sexually mature, we could relate to many of the characters in that book *Mission to Kala*, since we were beginning to connect with girls. I saw myself in those stories. At the same time, those works gave me a beautiful picture of the different parts of Africa, and made me feel very proud of our African heritage. There was beauty irrespective of where the story came from. Perhaps this is what inspired me in later years to develop my sense of pan-Africanism – and later, joining RUFORUM, wanting to see universities across Africa working closely together and African students studying and travelling across our continent. Looking back, I think that literature class made me an African.

I studied hard, supported by and supporting my colleagues in Class C. And God behold, when the results of our Cambridge O Level examinations for 1970 were announced, six of us from this supposedly weak class found our names listed among the top 20 best-performing students. This ungodly troublemaker, this *Mudokolo* from Olyanai-Kaberamaido, who had come barefoot to Namilyango, was among the top five best students!

And not only that, but I had earned a distinction in religious study! This was an irony indeed for many, including the priests. No wonder the head teacher, Father Kuipers, called the whole school together on the stairs to offer special prayers for this 'spiritually disturbed boy' (that is what he called me) and to thank God for helping me to pass with distinction. He prayed to God to help

remove the devil in me and make me a good boy. Amen! I remember hearing, 'Father, please, this is your son, help him to become a good man' – while all my fellow students stood there snickering.

I was a troublemaker, to be sure, but one of the only times I was ever suspended was for something I did not do. One day my friend Nkajja went drinking in Seeta, the nearby trading centre. He was staggering along in the road coming back to the school, when one of our teachers at Namilyango, an Englishman, spotted him. This teacher hauled my friend before Father Kuipers, and my friend was suspended for two weeks. But the matter didn't end there. Father Kuipers, knowing we were such great friends, assumed we must have been drinking together. I too was given a letter of suspension, and sent home for two weeks. Looking back, I am proud that I was suspended because of my best friend getting drunk. More than anything, these episodes built solidarity among us students.

Back home in Olyanai, however, I was a disgrace! Being suspended, I was sent home for two weeks, and the story was all over the village. 'The son of Edimu is a drunkard!' My father and grandfather both being disciplinarians, I received a lot of canings, and was given a bigger plot to dig in the garden, because I had wasted their money and spoiled their reputation. I think that was the worst of it; there was no reason I could give that made sense to them. In our society, young people were not meant to be drunkards, and yet here I was: a drunkard! And of course, it was my poor mother who had to go and raise extra money for my bus fare to and from school!

But on most of my visits back home between terms, I was proud. Boy, was I proud! Dressed up smartly in a pressed white shirt, with a belt for my trousers, I loved going with my sisters to the village market to be shown off and introduced to all the girls. Through such scenes, I could really relate to one of the books I had especially loved in school, *Mission to Kala*. It was such a funny portrait of a failed student going back to his village and being shown

off and fussed over by his relatives and aunties, who were always bringing him girls to marry. One could link to that story very well! It reminded me of my own mother thinking no girl would ever be good enough for me, and fretting that all these girls were trying to take away her son!

Leaving the village to go back to school, we kids would wait for the bus at the stop by the village borehole, where local women would give us *chapatis* or would press a shilling into our hands, saying, 'Please go and buy something for yourself'. These small gestures gave me such a strong sense of being supported by my community. Even those women who were not part of the family were willing to part with something small for me: 'This is our child from the village, going to school.'

When we returned to school, in buses crammed with other schoolchildren, our wooden suitcases and metal trunks would be full of groundnuts and other treats, provided by our friends and family members, to last us the entire term. On one sad occasion, though, it was not to be; just before our bus reached Namilyango, we were stopped by soldiers at a roadblock who opened our suitcases and trunks, looked at our groundnuts and demanded if they were bullets. 'You are not allowed to have these bullets!' Despite our weeping and wailing, they confiscated the lot!

Meanwhile, my world continued to expand, having much to do with rugby, which was introduced during my second year, in 1968. We had a number of teachers who came from Scotland and Ireland, and they came with this queer-looking ball, and this game of teamwork and flow, passing the ball up the field and piling into massive scrums. By third year, we had class competitions, and I was one of the students to be press-ganged by the fathers into representing my class. It did not take long for me to fall in love with the game; and before I knew it, I was the captain of Namilyango rugby team. Later in my school years, I became the captain of the Uganda rugby team.

I loved rugby. I think it was another thing that made me a man, made me who I am. It was a beautiful game of teamwork, where it's not up to the individual to shine – like the football star Maradona dribbling the ball around the field – but where it all revolves around teamwork, passing the ball and making very quick decisions. We played within the school and with other, neighbouring schools: Kisubi, a Catholic school; and then a Protestant one in western Uganda, called Ntare. In Kampala, we played against Kibuli, a Muslim school. It was a beautiful thing. It helped me know people and appreciate the diversity of Uganda's people.

Rugby also gave me my first opportunities to travel beyond our Ugandan borders. Our first international matches were just across the border, in Kenya. But when I joined the national team, we had the opportunity to travel to Australia. It was the story of our village! My biological grandmother, Rebecca Ayoko, associated travel in an aeroplane with the Queen of England, and proudly told everyone, 'The son of Edimu was in the sky, flying with the Queen! I told you, my blood is very strong. That's my grandson!'

On our Australian tour, we thought we had brought a very strong team. But alas, our hosts beat us, 86-nil! After the match, they treated us to a barbecue with the most delicious meat. But they were serving it with forks. I remember we conferred among ourselves and agreed you couldn't enjoy eating meat with a fork – you had to use your hands. So we started eating the meat with our hands, as our hosts stared on. We might have lost the match, but at least we ate good meat; that was our consolation.

Those years at Namilyango expanded my world in other ways too. I thought of those women from my village who would press a pancake or a coin into my hand, offering me blessings for the road. These small encounters inspired me over the years, and showed me the importance of always giving back to your society and building your community.

In Kampala, I was similarly supported by my uncle, Stanley Ewalu, who worked as a prison warden. It was only much later, when I started working, that I realised how this man, living on a modest salary with his own family to support, had sacrificed for me, always somehow finding the means to buy clothing and pay my school fees. As I grew, this inculcated in me a strong desire to do something to help my people; it was a big motivation for my wife and me later on to build a primary school for my community at Olyanai that today houses about 900 students, and more recently a secondary school that caters for 600 students. It is part of my giving back and creating access to education for rural children so that they too may have a future. Thank heavens I had a great wife! She supported and supervised the construction of the primary school. She wanted her husband's people to develop through education. Some years later, after her death, my children and I built the secondary school in my village in honour of my wife, 'Amoit Edimu', who loved our people and area so much, even with the limited education she had.

CHAPTER 5

ENTERING MAKERERE

To motivate any Ugandan person to strive in their education, there is only one household name that needs mention: 'Makerere University'. Occasionally, students from Makerere would visit us at Namilyango College, and you could see their pride. How I wanted to become one of them! All of my teachers at Holy Angels and Namilyango, and possibly even in primary school too, had charmed and inspired us with stories of this great institution, and held out the possibility that, with hard work and good marks, we too might one day reach this great beacon of learning, opportunity and enlightenment. There was such drive from all of our teachers: 'Don't spoil our record. You must work hard and go to Makerere.' Indeed, attending Namilyango, one of the country's top schools, I had always known that I would most likely go to Makerere.

So, Makerere was always my dream. But finally reaching that pinnacle for me felt almost an anticlimax.

Although I had performed very well in my O Level exams, my results in the university entrance examinations were lacklustre. The newspaper published a list of the national examination results, however, and my whole village was in uproar. My name was at the top of the list! It was not because my results were brilliant, as my clan mistakenly believed, but because Adipala topped the alphabetical

list of names. Next to my name were those proud initials: 'NGO', for Namilyango. Even when I went to the university, many people knew me already as that boy at the top of the list from NGO.

Naturally, my first choice was to study medicine because, in the mindset we were brought up with at school, this represented the pinnacle of achievement. In our education system and our communities, there was pride in becoming a medical doctor. But I had not performed well enough to get into the medical school at Makerere, and was instead admitted into the Faculty of Agriculture.

I had also applied for a British Commonwealth Scholarship and, through that, had been admitted to the school of medicine at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria, as well as to one of the southern African universities, perhaps in Lesotho or Botswana, to study veterinary medicine. I was planning to go to Ibadan, but the academic year started earlier at Makerere than it did in Ibadan, so I decided to join the first few weeks of the programme at Makerere, although it was never really my intention to train as an agriculturalist.

I joined the faculty of agriculture at Makerere as an undergraduate in 1973. Arriving on the campus, even though I was not interested academically, I couldn't help but be infected by the general buzz in the atmosphere, just thinking about where I was! We freshers had long been anticipating this; to find ourselves here was the attainment of a dream that had been nurtured over the years by our school teachers and held up as the ultimate achievement. The world was now opening up to us, and anything was possible. The class itself was not the striking thing. It was more about coming of age, leaving school behind, meeting all the other girls and boys, my fellow Makerereans, and stepping forward on the path of life.

All that changed with the first class we had, which was mycology: the study of mushrooms. It was one of the most beautiful classes I have ever attended. We looked at infected plants under the microscope, examining the cellular patterns of the fungi, and

the infected plant tissues. Our lecturer, Prof. Alphonse Emechebe, speaking in a musical Nigerian accent, related the fungi to our bodies as well. I could only compare his teaching to that of Mr Epau in Primary 6. Tapping his toe on the floor to emphasise his points as he spoke, his musical voice echoing in the wood-panelled first-year lecture room, this plant pathologist and mycologist engaged everybody in the class. He was teaching a difficult subject but he made it exciting, and animated our minds with examples we could all relate to: the ringworm that itches in your hair as a child; the fungal diseases that can spread to your testicles and feet. He drew connections between things: 'The fungus you are looking at is both edible, as in the mushrooms you eat, and can cause disease.' Learning all the taxonomies and the Latin scientific names got me excited. I loved his approach to teaching, and his passion for his subject was infectious. This man loved what he was doing. Because of this teacher, I decided to remain at Makerere and do agriculture, and I have never regretted it.

This reminds me today of how fundamentally important a teacher can be in a student's life: teachers can either make or break you. Reflecting back, I was fortunate to have such great scientists as my teachers. Prof. Emechebe was a quality lecturer, researcher and publisher. Another was Prof. Joseph Mukiibi, an outstanding plant pathologist. Then another one of my lecturers, Prof. John Mugerwa, was a great animal scientist. These people paved the way for my own academic journey, and helped make me who I am today.

The agriculture course was tough. We attended lectures by day, and read and studied long into the night. One of my benchmates was a girl who had actually left the medical programme in the hope of finding agriculture easier. She was wrong, and eventually transferred back to medicine. Our class was small, with maybe 60 students in total, and the facilities were good. We had one microscope per student; I believe now you have 5 to 10 students

sharing a microscope. That is one challenge that African universities are now facing: they don't have the facilities to cope with their high enrolments of students.

I also enjoyed the campus social life. The auditorium in the main hall of the Administration building was our dance hall and was sometimes a space for political rallies. Especially during the first year, we looked forward to these events. I fondly remember learning to dance, and trying to pick up girlfriends. I can still recall those beautiful Lingala songs, which people of my generation still get up to dance to: the exquisite musical voices of Tabu Ley, Franco Luambo Makiadi singing 'Mamou', Pépé Kalé, Aurlus Mabélé, and Madilu System, and that unforgettable Lumumbox song 'Baby Touch Me'! I see those same things at work today in the young people on campus, students involving themselves in social life and campus politics. The student years are a beautiful time, a time to be enjoyed, and a time when leadership potential is developed. That connection with what you have at the university, and in the schools, is a very beautiful part of life. This is what makes life.

In the second year, we students moved to the university farm in Kabanyolo for our practical training. Uganda was still in its glory days, and life on the farm was idyllic; our days were filled with hard work and good, wholesome food in abundance. Twice a week we would attend lectures on the main university campus, about 16 kilometres away, and the rest of the week would be spent doing practicals on the farm. We worked in two- or three-week rotations, learning all the different areas of crop production and animal husbandry. It was the first time I had seen some of the exotic animals: the big dairy cows, larger than our cows back home.

We never missed the city, because life was beautiful at Kabanyolo. Living out there in the quiet, in the fresh air, I became a good student. The environment was very good for reading.

We had excellent relationships with the local community around Kabanyolo. We would ride our bicycles to visit the surrounding community and practise playing the role of agricultural extension agents. Somehow, I still failed to learn Luganda, the local language – but I think that is the only thing I didn't do well there.

The food was also excellent and on weekends the teachers and students would come from main campus to visit the farm and enjoy the good food and the fresh air. I became the Minister of Entertainment for our class, organising dances, drama shows and films. Outside of our dining hall, there grew a beautiful, verdant old mango tree, and I still loved to climb up in the branches – although now my motivation was not to escape or to ambush anyone, but to pick fruit and throw it down to the female students waiting below.

In the dining hall, we were treated to beef and goat meat, eggplants, and delicious banana pancakes, among other delicacies. It was here that I learned to like avocados. All the good food fuelled our long days working on the farm. In the dairy, we learned all the different levels of production: lactating, milking, when to take those little ones away from their mothers. We learned to milk by hand, which of course I already knew, and we learned machine milking, and how to grade the milk. Then there were the bulls being fattened for their meat. We took the animals to graze, walking the big herds across the road, and later bringing them back, which of course brought me back to my boyhood days of herding cattle at the swamp.

The technicians working on the farm made sure we got every bit as dirty as they did, and would have us all sloshing through the cow dung in our gumboots. Some of our colleagues had grown up in the city and faced challenges. I remember one tall girl in particular, who slipped and fell down in the slippery cow dung. Even her perfectly done hair was covered in cow dung, poor girl. The whole class was laughing at her.

Pigs were also exotic to me. I had first seen domesticated pigs at Namilyango, but only at a distance. Now I had to get up close to them, with their strange fleshy snouts and their continual grunting. We had to look after them in the piggery and learn to inseminate them. Not only did they ooze a frightful smell that repelled me, they also looked stupid compared to our calves and cows! Inseminating the pigs was a problem for another of our classmates, a girl called Ajaro from Teso, who was very religious and didn't want anything to do with sex. Everyone was laughing as she wrung her hands and complained. We all watched...Would she to do it? But she had to do it. This was our practical training. If she didn't, she wouldn't get her degree. Eventually, she conducted the insemination, pushing her hands deep into the vagina of the pig. We all clapped our hands and laughed at her, 'We told you it was very nice – see what you have been missing!'

The goat-breeding programme at Kabanyolo was very vibrant. It was run by Prof. Gabriel Kiwuwa, who had collected indigenous goats from all across Uganda, such as the Mubende goats from central and western Uganda, and had also brought in different goat breeds from as far afield as South Africa. As he talked us through all these different kinds of goats, you could actually see the different attributes of all these animals and understand their different potentials. That helped me to see the value of diversity. How do you improve things? Why do you need this breed? Why do you want that characteristic? What will this one give you in terms of meat, in terms of milk? We didn't drink goat milk at the time, but I know some projects in our RUFORUM network today have been focused on this new area, goat-milk production, and the challenges of finding the right breeds to produce the best-quality milk under local conditions.

Our practicals at Kabanyolo were also my introduction to more mechanised ways of farming. We learned about engineering, driving tractors and working mini combine harvesters that the

university would rent to harvest their maize crop. I don't think I still remember how to drive a tractor, but we were trained in operating and maintaining all the different machinery.

The area I excelled in was crop production and horticulture. This stemmed from my having as a boy tended my grandfather's garden, which had included such exotics, to our region, as coffee. Prof. John Dungu was the coffee expert at Kabanyolo, in charge of the gardens in which we grew coffee, tomatoes, cabbages, onions, eggplants and peppers. The poor professor! One of the key problems in horticulture is that caterpillars will come and eat the crops; but among us students it was assumed that he was the one spreading the caterpillars, as we struggled to fathom how the plants we had left thriving just the day before could have been reduced overnight to these decimated stalks! Of course, as we learned, we began to realise that it was not our professor who was responsible for the damage to our crops. Diseases and pests were building up and spreading. But at first we all thought it was Prof. Dungu deliberately distributing diseases and pests among our plants to destroy them!

We also had real entrepreneurial training, which for me was a big motivation because I needed pocket money. We students were allowed to sell what we produced, and so I learned that you could make quick money from growing tomatoes. Our immediate market was the students' dining hall, but my entrepreneurial acumen also took me further afield, to the markets of Wandegeya, a suburb of Kampala not far from Makerere's main campus.

We were still in the early years of Idi Amin – long before all the atrocities of his rule came to light – and he evoked strong feelings of nationalism in us. We enjoyed listening on the radio to this uneducated man making a mockery of the British. I was the leading student commercial grower of tomatoes and cabbages at Kabanyolo that year; so when Idi Amin himself came for our Agricultural Open Day, the honour of presenting him with some

of our prize cabbages and potatoes was bestowed on me! I felt extremely proud that day.

We returned to the main campus for our third year. Patrice Lumumba Hall, my hall of residence, became the centre of my social world. One incident stands out in particular. A friend of mine, Thomas Ewechu, had visited a *Malaya*, one of the good ladies of Wandegeya who serviced the needs of randy students. He apparently did not pay his bill, so this lady went to the police, and the police came marching up to Lumumba Hall to find the miscreant.

All this was unknown to me, as I lay bare-chested on my bed, as I liked to do, innocently reading one of my agriculture textbooks. Suddenly, my door burst open and this friend of mine streaked right past me, hurling himself out of my first-floor window! It was quite a drop to the ground, but my friend ran off and disappeared, apparently unharmed. I barely had time to rush to the window before three policemen stormed into my room. They grabbed me by the neck and marched me outside to the quadrangle, where quite a large crowd of students was already gathering. 'This is the one who has not paid his dues! This is the one who has not paid his dues!'

They brought me before the *Malaya* and asked her, 'Is this the one?' But she shook her head and told the policemen they had arrested the wrong person. Truth did not matter, however, as far as my hall mates and classmates were concerned. From then on, I was notorious in Lumumba Hall as the man who had not paid his dues to the *Malaya*! As for my friend, he graduated as a medical doctor, moved to Zimbabwe, and later on contracted HIV and passed away. We had remained friends even though he caused me this embarrassment.

As I continued through university, I was always looking for opportunities to earn extra money to send back home. I took one job cleaning offices in the Faculty of Agriculture. A secretary in the dean's office, a very large woman from the Mt Elgon region, started

harassing me. One day, when the two of us were alone, she came up to me suddenly and pushed me into the closet, where she started grabbing my testicles and forcing herself on me. She was so large, there was simply no escaping.

Her assault on me left me rather shaken. And after this particular incident, her harassment continued. But when I told my friends about it later, they all laughed and said, 'What's wrong with you? Why didn't you just go for it?' I might have just gone for it, but at the same time I found the incident strangely disempowering. It had reminded me of staying with my uncle Ekwamu in Obulubulu and Kaberamaido as a child all those years ago, when the women he brought home with him would later come to my bed and perform strange sexual acts with me, always leaving me uncomfortable and confused.

Every time I walked into the dean's office, I could not help but be reminded of the assault. I was a poor student, and this woman had abused her power over me. I don't look back at the incident with any bitterness, but rather with a recognition that there are a lot of things that happen in society, that young men and young women alike go through. This is something I went through too.

My graduation ceremony for my undergraduate degree was a memorable experience. The ceremony was held in the city square in Kampala and Idi Amin was presented with an honorary degree. Although Amin was a Muslim, he understood the lives of students. The beer and other drinks flowed freely at our graduation celebrations. I got very drunk and, as it was described to me later, when I returned to Wandegeya I was the one swaying from side to side, directing the traffic. The jubilation I felt at having just finished university was immense. I was taking my first steps into adulthood. And as I continued on my unfolding life path, I was filled with excitement and curiosity as to where the next steps of my journey would lead me.

CHAPTER 6

'IDI AMIN GAVE ME MY WIFE'

As soon as I finished my undergraduate studies, I received an International Development Research Centre (IDRC) scholarship from Canada to work with Prof. Mukiibi towards completing a masters on crop improvement of finger millet. Certain varieties of finger millet around the country were being decimated by a fungal disease called blast and so I was called in because of my interest in fungal work. The project aimed to identify finger millet varieties that combined all the attributes of being fast growing, high yielding and resistant to blast disease. We were to grow different finger millet lines at Kabanyolo and select the promising ones, in terms of yield and disease resistance, to take for further testing at the research stations in the different millet-growing areas of the country. In 1976, I moved back to Kabanyolo to begin my work.

The beauty of this project, for me, was that it took me to parts of Uganda I had not seen before. Serere, near my father's ancestral home, was a key millet-growing area, and the local research station there had done extensive work on it. From there, I would travel further north to Lira, where the research station at Ngetta was also working on millet. I also travelled to the Kalengere research station in the highlands of southwestern Uganda, where the environment was green and mountainous, in contrast to the flat, semi-arid

savannah around Olyanai, my home. Through this project, we sought to discover how the crop yields and disease profiles might vary under such different growing conditions, with the ultimate aim of making the optimal varieties available to farmers in these different areas.

Having by now spent a good seven years living in the Buganda region, at Makerere and Namilyango, I thought I had seen hills. But the famed seven hills of Kampala, I discovered, were nothing at all compared to the jagged cliffs and dramatic precipices I met with in the southwestern highlands, while hurtling along steep, narrow and often muddy roads, banging about in the back of a battered old pickup truck and hanging on for dear life. I mostly kept my eyes closed, too terrified to look down.

Notwithstanding such terrors, my work on this project expanded my horizons and yielded valuable learnings about crop-improvement processes. I began to learn how to develop new varieties and to appreciate why certain varieties may be more suited to growing in one place than another. I also began to see the importance of having a central place, like Kabanyolo, for doing all of the preliminary testing, so as to avoid a lot of unnecessary work and duplication of effort in the satellite research stations.

More importantly, though, I was beginning to appreciate some of the intricacies of working with farmers to make sure the varieties we produced were meeting their wishes and expectations, which linked to their local food culture. Farmers in eastern Uganda, for example, wanted millet that would produce good flour, *atap*, for their local bread, *kwon*. For this, they needed varieties with big, lighter-coloured seeds to produce an attractive texture and colour. No less important was their consideration of the attributes needed to produce good *kongo ting*, the very same local millet beer that my relatives had dabbed in my mouth when I was a baby, as part of my initiation to the world. In western Uganda, meanwhile, it was no less important to farmers to have millet varieties that would yield

the highest quality for their own millet flour, called *kalo* (or *karo*), as well as their fermented millet porridge *bushera*.

Looking back, I can see I was beginning to understand the issues of responding to stakeholder demands and farmer preferences. It was not enough to view our research only from a crop science perspective; we also needed to consider which varieties farmers would take and adapt, in combination with looking at how these varieties would perform in certain environments, or in several different environments with their own particular cultural and physical features.

Working on millet gave me the exposure to begin to understand some of these considerations that shaped people's practical experiences of producing food in real life. Universities, distanced in their ivory towers from farmers and even from the national research and extension agencies, were not well positioned to gain this type of understanding at that time. I didn't realise it then, but my experience working on this project produced a thread of farmer engagement that I would pick up again at a later stage in my career at Makerere and in RUFORUM, and which would ultimately become one of the main threads of the RUFORUM network.

At the time, however, I had more immediate concerns facing me. The idyllic world of Kabanyolo that I had known just a few years earlier as an undergraduate was no longer.

As I focused on writing up my research findings and teaching at the university, I was still relatively insulated from the turmoil that was gripping my society, as Idi Amin's rule began to spiral into chaos. As committed as ever, my colleagues and I would often wake up at 3 am to catch the bus to the main campus, where we delivered our lectures. Often we would wait for hours, increasingly unsure of when that bus might actually come.

Life was getting harder. Fuel, soap, sugar and oil were becoming scarce commodities. Even food was becoming harder to find. My fellow students and I would pool our money to fuel

up our university bus and travel to outlying areas of Kampala and beyond to stock up on *matoke*, cassava, sweet potatoes and other staples. Buying food, we would also have to make provision for the soldiers at the roadblocks who would confiscate a share of it for themselves.

On one such excursion, the soldiers at a roadblock singled out one of our colleagues, Bonny Ntare, a big strong postgraduate student from southwestern Uganda. 'Who are you?' they asked him. 'What are you doing?'

When Bonny responded that he was a student at the university, they chorused around him: 'You are still studying, old man? Why don't you go and look after your children? Why are you still studying? You are studying to rule whom?'

The soldiers detained him and told the rest of us to leave. We all stumbled helplessly back onto the bus and continued on our way. A few minutes later our driver, William Mukasa, stopped the bus. 'We cannot leave our friend behind,' he said.

We returned to the roadblock and pleaded with the soldiers to release Bonny. Finally they did, and we all returned, shaken but unharmed, to Kabanyolo.

By 1978, the fighting had reached Kampala. And although things remained peaceful in Kabanyolo, tensions were building – and we all felt it. Streams of refugees were arriving in Kabanyolo and we could feel the war advancing slowly towards us. Some of the stories and descriptions we heard were simply bizarre; one day in Kabanyolo, I met a colleague I knew from the Faculty of Agriculture who was all in disarray, running from the main campus, where she told me the soldiers were forcing people to have sex with each other at gunpoint.

As the endgame approached, Makerere and Kabanyolo both sank into neglect. Idi Amin's people were mostly uneducated soldiers who had a natural distrust of education, and put no priority on it. 'You want a degree to rule whom? You want to be educated

to come and rule us?' That was their attitude towards academics.

Every day, greater and greater throngs of displaced people came running to Kabanyolo. Before long, our bungalows were crowded with refugees and people were sleeping on the verandahs and anywhere they could find space. Gradually, my spacious two-bedroom bungalow filled up with friends and relatives. I was living in a refugee camp.

Almost all of the markets had stopped operating and we had very little food, so naturally we turned to the university's livestock. We slaughtered and ate, one by one, all the 200 or 300 head of cows on the farm, as well as the pigs, chickens and goats.

Because so many displaced people had gathered in Kabanyolo, farmers and traders with food began coming there to sell it. One day, as I was lounging about the house, bare-chested as usual, a tractor laden with sweet potatoes arrived in Kabanyolo. I joined the throng of people that gathered around the tractor to buy sweet potatoes. But, in an instant, my attention shifted from the sweet potatoes to the face of one of the women who was selling them. She was young and very beautiful, with big expressive eyes.

She and her sister were giving out sweet potatoes and collecting the money. Without thinking, I spoke to her sister, who seemed to be the one in charge. 'I want your sister,' I said, before I could think. 'I want to marry her.'

'What will you do for me?' asked the sister, taking my declaration seriously. I think as far as she was concerned I would be a good catch for her sister, especially in the turmoil of this conflict. Being attached to the university, I was marketable. I was no longer a penniless youth from a backward tribe, with nothing to offer but my grass-thatched hut. I was a masters student, employed at the university. I had a future.

I didn't exchange any words with the beauty who had stolen my heart, only with her sister. The beautiful young woman had turned her face away, possibly because she was shy. 'Okay,' said the older

sister, 'you will have to come to my father's home.' And she told me the location, somewhere near Namulonge. A day or two later, I sent our local askari, an old man with a hunchback, to go and find these two sisters and bring them to Kabanyolo.

As I spoke with the beautiful young woman, Theopista Nagujja, and got to know her a little more, I grew more and more certain that I did want her to become my wife!

She and her family were also refugees from the war. When the fighting had broken out in Kampala the family had scattered, and she and some of her siblings had run to an uncle's house about 10 kilometres from Kabanyolo, in Namulonge. The uncle had a lot of sweet potatoes, so they uprooted them and borrowed the tractor from Namulonge research station and used it to come and sell the potatoes, because that was a market opportunity.

I visited the girl's family and they agreed that she should come and stay with me for a time. If all worked out, we could marry.

We stayed together for about five months, and then I went to her family to conduct the traditional ceremony for our wedding. The fighting had disrupted our lives and our traditional ways of doing things, and perhaps it also heightened our sense of urgency to do what would bring us joy. I should have brought my own father and family members to her house to speak for me and conduct the marriage business in the proper way. But the war had made this impossible. Instead, I had to find local relatives to speak on my behalf and, fortunately, I had some friends in Kampala who made acceptable spokespeople.

We never had a church ceremony but got married in the traditional way. I think, when all is said and done, I am more of a traditionalist. At the marriage ceremony, however, I did the one thing I was not supposed to do; I spoke out and argued on the bride price, instead of letting my friends do the negotiating for me. Her family knew I came from a cattle area, and they asked me to pay triple the bride price that I knew they had demanded for the marriage

of her older sister. I could not help but complain, while my friends gestured wildly for me to be quiet. It was unfair: I was being given a foreigner's rate! At last, a price was agreed upon, not in cows but in cash and clothing. I may have been discriminated against, but it did not matter, I was able to pay. Idi Amin's rule did not outlast our marriage by many weeks. And soon after we became husband and wife, peace returned to our country – although it would take a few months more before a feeling of 'normality' returned to our lives. But we were very happy, and I will always remain grateful to Idi Amin for one thing: he gave me my wife!

CHAPTER 7

POLITICS

Idi Amin was overthrown in April 1979, and when that regime fell the possibility returned of being an active citizen in the making of a new country. The past few years had been a nightmare, and now we could all wake up and set things back on course to the way they had been. In the 1960s, our country had been ahead of South Korea, ahead of Kenya. We were the Pearl of Africa. Our education system was excellent. As my own experience had shown, it didn't matter if you were educated in the village or in the city; our system made it possible for any child who met the performance standards to advance to the highest levels, even to Makerere University!

After the fall of Amin, many of us young people dreamed of restoring our country to its former glory. This was the spirit with which I entered politics.

As our country lurched towards a new era, there was one leader who, for me and many others, represented this dream of a new Uganda. That was Milton Obote. For me, the old memory resurfaced of having been kicked around at school after he won the 1962 elections, only to return home and find my family celebrating his victory. My family had remained staunch supporters of Milton Obote's UPC party, and he was deeply loved throughout the Kaberamaido and Teso regions.

In fact, when I brought my wife home to Olyanai for the first time, at Christmas in 1979, I remember finding my father quarrelling bitterly with my mother: where had she put his UPC card? They had hidden the card away during Amin's time, when it was not safe to have supported the previous regime. Now they were furiously digging through their few possessions, trying to find it. My father was even telling my mother to go and search for it in the granary. My parents spent weeks looking for that party card, and I don't know if they ever found it.

These scenes must have been strange for my wife, coming from Buganda, where Obote was reviled for having sent their *Kabaka* off to die in exile. Now here she was in Kaberamaido district, where Obote was regarded as the Messiah! My parents' strong beliefs in Obote pushed me to love my party even more.

Meanwhile, my wife embraced my family and the simplicity of village life wholeheartedly. I still don't understand how she linked up so seamlessly with my people, accepted our culture and got stuck in to village life from the very beginning. In those days, it was all still grass-thatched houses, buzzing with mosquitoes because my family lived down next to the swamp, and collecting water from the springs, because there were no boreholes. My wife learned to cook our food, and fitted seamlessly into village life. I began to see a new side of her emerge: she was so quiet when we first met. But they say your true character only emerges later; and indeed, after we married, she found her level. She was gregarious, and could socialise and mix with anyone.

And this woman was not afraid of hard work! She was delighted when my father taught her how to fish. In the compound, she could kill a snake, or a frog. The one thing she could not abide in my village, however, were the caterpillars. Each time she went out into the garden, especially in April when the caterpillars came out, my mother and father would walk ahead of her to clear the caterpillars away.

As we settled into our married life, we would go for short visits to Olyanai. On one visit, we had brought *matoke* with us, the green cooking bananas that are a staple throughout Buganda but are not eaten in my area. My mother, welcoming as always, really wanted to cook for her daughter-in-law but didn't know how to prepare *matoke* and just dropped the bananas into the boiling water, not realising she was supposed to peel them first. My wife got quite a shock being presented with these cooked bananas still in their skins. The two of them had a good laugh about it and always joked about it afterwards.

Back in Kampala, life started to return to normal, although it remained difficult to find soap, oil, sugar and other commodities. The manufacturing base had collapsed, and it was very difficult to import things. At Makerere, there was hardly any funding, and we noticed these difficulties as our labs remained poorly stocked and we couldn't access chemicals and test tubes as we had before. I remember our vice-chancellor at the time, Prof. Senteza Kajubi, complaining that we were being given toilet paper but no money or food. The vice-chancellor complained, 'How will we use the toilet paper if we don't have any food?'

Throughout the late 70s and most of the 80s there was a total deterioration of the education system in this country. Sadly, this was not unique to Uganda but happened across most of Africa, as countries failed to sustain the upward trajectories of their post-independence years, and their institutions decayed throughout the 1980s and well into the 1990s.

I had another frustration in this atmosphere of scarcity. I had worked very hard to complete my masters thesis, which I had by this point started nearly five years previously. I had actually handed in my thesis within two years of embarking on it. But that thesis was still sitting on the shelf more than two years later, waiting for my supervisor and the external examiner to mark it. This was not unheard of in the slow, unaccountable academic culture of the time,

but I found it deeply frustrating. I was still employed as a teaching assistant, delivering lectures on the campus almost every day. But my career was stuck in limbo, while the rest of my life was moving fast.

My supervisor always gave me the same response when I complained to him: 'Young man, wait. The time will come.'

This professor never did in fact mark my thesis. At last, after more than two years, the external examiner gave feedback, writing, 'This is an excellent thesis: it is worth a PhD, not a masters.'

On that basis, the university decided to go ahead and award me my degree. This was not how it should have been done; examiners are expected to send a comprehensive report on a timely basis. Under the circumstances, however, I was not going to complain further. With my masters finally in hand, I immediately joined the academic staff at Makerere University as a lecturer.

Meanwhile, I was getting caught up in the political buzz on campus. Milton Obote had strong support from the western, eastern and northern parts of the country, and naturally in Makerere's cosmopolitan mix a strong support base began to emerge. When it was announced that Obote was returning to Uganda, some of us students mobilised a bus and travelled to Bushenyi in western Uganda for his arrival.

The scene at Bushenyi was like Moses taking his people back to the Holy Land. It was beautiful. Young people poured out in droves – including so many beautiful young women – everyone wearing red and blue, the party colours. I found the jubilation, the energy and togetherness of all of us so exciting, and I was inspired to become part of it. And then Milton Obote gave an excellent speech, galvanising people around his slogan 'One Uganda, one country, one nation, one people', and calling our country 'Ouganda', departing from the British pronunciation, 'Uganda'. The jubilation continued, and when Obote later visited Kaberamaido, my father picked five of his own cows to be slaughtered for the celebrations

held to welcome him. 'Welcome to the Holy Land' declared one of the banners that fluttered over one of the most memorable celebrations the district had ever witnessed.

In the campaigning for elections to be held in December 1980, I led a group of students to visit Milton Obote at his home in Kololo, Kampala, and offer our support. Obote believed in youth as the fulcrum of leadership, and used to host student leaders from all over the country. One of his strengths was identifying young party cadres and grooming them for leadership. Receiving his visitors in a big tent erected on his lawn outside his house, he would invite them one by one to have a seat in his presidential chair, saying, 'How will you manage our country? You are now the president.'

When my turn came to sit in the presidential chair, I felt his powerful gaze on me. He spoke about leadership – the power you have as a leader, and the responsibility it carries.

I used my own money to organise a rally for Obote in Kabanyolo, where my wife and I were still living. He was not popular with the local community there in the heart of Buganda! But I was part of a dynamic and sharp group of young people on the campus who did support him.

After so many years in exile, the party wanted to take the political temperature and know what their support base was like across the entire country. Where were they weak? Where were they strong? And what were the issues people cared about? The UPC tasked me to lead that team, and we sent students around the country to gather information. It was very clear we were not going to get votes in this Buganda region. But I think we were more than 90% sure that we would win in the rest of the country.

I had stood for and won the local election to become the UPC chairperson representing Makerere and Kabanyolo, meaning that I became the party's local representative for Makerere and the surrounding communities. While the national voting was done by ballot, the custom for selecting local representatives was particular:

people would go and physically line up behind their preferred candidate. In my case, it was the workers from around Kabanyolo and Wandegeya, rather than the students, who came out to support me. I believe the workers perceived me as being fair and not discriminating against anyone. Standing with the other candidates in the main square on campus, I suddenly found that I had the largest number of supporters lining up behind me, many of them workers who had been brought in by lorry to vote.

As Obote returned to the presidency after winning the election, I had the great honour of finding myself selected as one of the young people he brought close to him to groom and mentor. My wife and I were often invited to the State House, where the president's wife herself would serve us, as we were given advice on how to conduct ourselves as leaders. I think my wife enjoyed this immensely. The president would talk about the responsibility that goes with leadership: you have to make good use of your power; things may not always go the way you want them to; you will face problems, even with your closest allies around you. He had been through this himself.

In my life, I have met with only two women who met my ideal of perfection. One, as I have said, was the Lango woman I had known from childhood in my village. The other was Miria Obote, the Uganda First Lady, a dignified and humble Muganda person. I kept telling the Baganda people they were very stupid; they had given the most beautiful woman to a man they didn't like! The honour of being served by this humble woman and of being coached and told that one day I could become president – these were rare moments that I have always treasured.

However, representing my constituency (Mpigi East) in the UPC parliament, which officially had about 200 Obote supporters, put me in a difficult position from the start. My area was openly hostile to my party, and from the earliest days an insurgency was brewing there. At rallies, people would sometimes sidle up to me and tell

me that they supported us clandestinely but did not dare to support us publicly. I served everybody equally and did not discriminate, which I think is the reason I survived there.

On 27 April 1982, meanwhile, my oldest son, Milton, was born at Kabanyolo clinic. Arriving at the clinic, I was confronted by a very excited nurse, who was speaking to me animatedly in Luganda. Of course, she was trying to tell me that I had a big, beautiful, healthy baby son – but I could not understand a word she was saying. Holding him later for the first time, I saw that he had my wife's large, beautiful eyes. And I was struck by how his skinny body shivered and shook; this reminded me of the cold I had felt so many years earlier, arriving at Namilyango without a warm jersey.

In my family, Milton's birth caused much jubilation, not least because he was a boy. My whole family was delighted, especially my sisters.

By this time, my wife and my father were fast friends. She enjoyed wonderful relations with all of my family – but her friendship with my father was something special. In my culture, a wife is associated more with her father-in-law than with her husband. And so in the village my wife became known by the nickname of 'Amoit Edimu': the Muganda daughter of Edimu. I don't know how it was that she loved cows almost as much as he did; she would accompany him, carrying my father's bag (containing money, and food for my wife), as he travelled around the village and beyond buying cows and conducting his cattle trade. Sometimes I could not help but be jealous of their friendship. They would spend hours discussing family business, after which my father would simply tell me, 'We have already discussed things, and she will tell you what you now need to do!'

After Milton was born, my wife took part in the same special women's ceremony that had marked my own birth so many years before. For the ritual, her body was smeared with shea nut oil from our local shea trees, and she danced with the women of the clan, her

breasts naked. This was the women's special day, and they cooked the best food and kept it for themselves, taunting and provoking the men with complete impunity.

Around the same time as the ceremony was held, my wife and my father, knowing my hatred of the Catholic Church, schemed together to have Milton baptised at the Kakuya Catholic Mission, near Olyanai. By the time I found out about it, the deed had already been done!

Back in Kabanyolo, meanwhile, trouble was brewing. My constituents came to me with grievances; they were being harassed at police roadblocks. Young people were being targeted and killed by rebels. Other youths were disappearing, running off to the bush to join a growing insurgency against the government. People were being victimised both by the government and by the rebels, who were trying to cause panic and destabilise the government. Tensions were building between members of the Langi and Acholi tribes in the north. I raised these issues in the UPC parliament, but this only annoyed the president. From my vantage point within 'enemy territory', however, I could very clearly see these ugly rifts forming, and I felt it my duty to speak out about what I saw.

One day, my wife pulled me aside and told me that our neighbour, Mrs William Mukasa, the wife of the driver who not all that long before had saved Bonny Ntare from Idi Amin's soldiers, had come to warn us that the rebels were planning an attack on the nearby police station at Kasangati. I immediately got in a public taxi and went to alert the security command office based at the International Conference Centre in Kampala. But I was too late. Returning from Kampala in a public taxi that night, as we neared Kabanyolo I saw armed youths laughing and milling about in the streets. Later on, my suspicions were confirmed; that very night, these youths had attacked the police station at Kasangati, killing the police officers and stealing their weapons.

From then on, the rebel activity in our area only increased.

Kabanyolo had become a frightening place. One day, I returned home to find my wife looking very troubled. Mrs Mukasa had visited once again, and this time she had been shaking. As she told my wife, she had been visited by rebels, who opened a bag and showed her a woman's severed head inside. It was an unambiguous warning. 'This is what happens to people who talk,' the rebels had told her.

It was clear we were no longer safe in Kabanyolo. Soon after that, we moved into a rundown apartment block on the university's main campus, where my family remained until 2004. Looking back on it, I pity my poor wife and children because that apartment was always filled with visitors: my in-laws, or students from my village or my department who needed a roof over their heads, and of course people regularly coming to see me on UPC business.

In those days, my political ambitions were only growing. I continued to believe in our party, even to the extent that I was ready to resign my position at the university and stand for public office.

But unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately as it turns out, I never got the chance. On 27 July 1985, I was attending a meeting in Soroti town, where I was planning to run for office representing Kaberamaido constituency, when we saw the alarming sight of vehicles filled with North Korean soldiers, who had been in our country training the Ugandan army, driving at breakneck speed, seemingly fleeing towards the Kenyan border. Several hours later, we heard the radio announcing that Milton Obote's government had been deposed by the army commander Lutwa, from the Acholi tribe.

As we sat there in our meeting, everybody completely stunned, we heard overhead three military helicopters, which then landed on a small strip of field near the centre of Soroti town. Those helicopters were a magnet for us, loyal to the party as we were – and we all raced out to the field, ready to receive instructions from our leaders and desperate to do something in the face of this shocking turn of events. Reaching the helicopters, we met Smith

Opon Acak, the army's chief of staff. All of us hot-headed youths were telling Opon Acak that we were ready to take up arms and join the fight to bring our president back to power. Not stopping to consider my wife and young family back in Kampala, or the fact that I had no military training whatsoever and had never even fired a gun, I too volunteered to get on that helicopter, wherever it may have taken me.

Fortunately, Opon Acak was a level-headed man. After he had thanked us for our dedication and bravery, he permitted several of the men who really were soldiers to get into the helicopters departing for Kenya. The rest of us were instructed to remain where we were, and to prepare for the coming battle to reinstate our president. For this task, we were also issued with big, heavy assault rifles.

Laden with these guns, I climbed aboard a passenger truck, which ferried me most of the way home to Olyanai. I must have appeared a ghastly apparition to my family, staggering as I was up the road and carrying these two guns, my bearing collapsed into a posture of utter desperation. I turned the guns over to my auntie Ada Adongo for safekeeping in her granary, and fell into an exhausted sleep.

A colleague of mine who was a proper soldier came by two or three days later to collect the guns. It was only then that we realised that all along one of the rifles had been cocked and ready to discharge!

After the dust had settled two or three weeks later, I returned to my family in Kampala. Contrasting starkly with the atmosphere of defeat and disbelief I had left behind in Olyanai, the atmosphere in Kampala was one of jubilation, as the much-reviled Milton Obote was truly gone. While I felt devastated, many on the campus were celebrating. It was hard to adjust to the new state of affairs; only weeks before, I had been a powerful political leader in this place – and now I was more or less in internal exile. People I thought were my friends gave me the cold shoulder.

From that moment onwards, I lost my faith in politics and politicians. I felt that my party had let us down, ignoring the warning signs that had been there all along. I had been among those trying to warn them, and I had been rebuffed at each attempt. Without politics in my life, I put greater focus on my academic career, and my colleagues were able to see that I could deliver and perform well.

Around this time, my mother had been diagnosed with cancer of the uterus and given six months to live. Very near the end, I took her to Lacor Hospital in Gulu where I remember her, always such a kind soul, trying to give comfort to the other patients, even as she herself was dying. I hired a vehicle to drive us back to Olyanai, some 400 kilometres, where within 30 minutes of arrival she passed away. This was on 1 October 1985. It pains me that, having sacrificed so much to give me an education, she died before she could see me become truly successful in my career.

Back at Makerere, I may have been disillusioned with politics and trying to keep my head down, but as usual I could not hide my true feelings. Sometimes on campus I could not restrain myself from getting into political arguments. One such argument, with the deputy vice-chancellor, had been building up for days. We confronted each other in a campus bar and, after I had my say, he started shouting at me: 'If we're so bad, would you be alive up till now? We know who you are, but we have not arrested you.'

Then he did call the security forces, who came roaring up in a truck and dragged me out into the parking lot. They were trying to load me into the vehicle when a tiny woman (Mrs Catherine Munyagwa, the head of the printery at Makerere) stepped forward and inserted herself between the security officers, the deputy vice-chancellor, who was also standing nearby, and me. 'What are you trying to do?' she exclaimed. 'You want to kill this man? What are you going to tell his people? You are all from the same place!'

Mrs Munyagwa's intervention drew a crowd of people around

us and, as we spoke, it became clear to everyone that ours was a political discussion and nothing more. I posed no threat to anyone, so the security officers left. But I think if she had not intervened, I would have been a dead person. It was a dangerous time to speak your mind, and I know a number of other people who were killed under similar circumstances.

My dean, Prof. John Mugerwa, was also in the crowd that evening. To him, I think, the incident made it clear that I needed to leave Uganda before I came to some real harm. Over the course of the following months he was able to arrange a scholarship for me to complete my PhD in the USA, under the USAID's Manpower for Agricultural Development (MFAD) project. This opened a new chapter for me, and set my life on a new course – a course it has followed to this day.

CHAPTER 8

THE USA

My wife and I were raising a young family. My son Raymond Ekwamu was born in 1985, and in 1988 my daughter Polina Atim, namesake of my mother, followed. I don't think my daughter was even 3 months old when I left Uganda for the United States to pursue my PhD. That decision to leave haunts me to this day. All the education in the world can never bring back that time we lost together as a family, or remove the pain of being apart. I still find it a terrible thing when families are separated, and have always taken pains to find a means of keeping our students with families in the RUFORUM network together when they move out to other institutions.

As I left my immediate family struggling at home, I was also hearing stories of Karamojong cattle rustlers and raids by armed rebel groups back in the village in Olyanai. Security in my village was breaking down as the insurgency spread. People were frightened. It was a terrible time for me to be going. I remember my wife breaking down and weeping at the airport as I left. But at that time the issue was also just to get out of Uganda. I knew that, if I stayed any longer, I was either going to open my mouth one day and be killed by soldiers or I was going to become a rebel. The tensions at the university were building and building, and I just couldn't stomach keeping my head down and my opinions to myself any longer.

Arriving in the USA was like stepping into a strange fairytale. I was travelling with a group of about 10 Ugandan PhD students. Mark Erbaugh, the MFAD programme coordinator at Ohio State University, met us at the airport and helped us settle into our lodgings at the university in Columbus. Mark later said he could always spot the Ugandans a mile away because we were always the most haggard, ragged-looking bunch of people around.

Considering the turmoil we had left behind in Kampala, perhaps it was not surprising that many of us were shell-shocked. Our first day on campus was punctuated by the commotion of a football game, American football being one of many strange new customs we would discover. Hearing all of that shouting and noise outside, we Ugandans were convinced that some kind of civil turmoil was breaking out around us, and we barricaded ourselves in our rooms. It was hours later, when Mark Erbaugh came to check on us and found us crouching in terror behind locked doors, that we discovered what we were hearing was perfectly normal for a Saturday afternoon on a football-mad American university campus.

Our hosts were very welcoming; they gave us a tour of the faculty and all the facilities, introducing us to all the lecturers and briefing us on American culture. People were friendly, but their accents were so foreign that we often didn't understand them. I remember one young man (Mike Boehm) in particular who kept trying to connect with me and help me feel at home; but I couldn't understand a word he was saying. I must have appeared very hostile, moving away from him as he was trying to talk to me. He kept on checking on me though. After I had been there long enough to understand his accent, we became good friends, and laughed about these awkward initial efforts to communicate.

The MFAD programme, which my Ugandan colleagues and I were all part of, was a big USAID-funded project to help rebuild capacity across Uganda's national agricultural research system. Ohio State University was the lead institution implementing this

project. MFAD provided funds for masters- and PhD-level training, which supported the programme's broader objectives of revitalising the country's research institutions, including our research stations at Kabanyolo, Namulonge and Serere.

Looking back, I see this programme as one of the most impactful investments ever made by USAID in Uganda. I credit my colleague and mentor, Prof. John Mugerwa, for having the savvy and foresight to negotiate the design of such a good and impactful programme with the Americans from its inception. I know that many international aid programmes have deservedly sketchy reputations; but to my mind MFAD was a rare success story, and contributed immeasurably towards building a solid national research system, with benefits that continue to ripple out across the nation and the region to this day.

I believe it is hugely thanks to MFAD that Uganda today continues to have one of the strongest national research systems (NARS) in Africa. Indeed, the strength of our research institute at Namulonge was a key drawcard for our RUFORUM network to harness almost 20 years later, as we developed our own capacity-strengthening PhD- and masters-level programmes, and tapped Makerere University to host our new programme in plant breeding and biotechnology. That programme brought Makerere into partnership with Namulonge, and other research institutions in Uganda, and has since developed into a Centre of Excellence serving the African continent.

But back to Ohio State University. It was time for us students to start developing our research proposals, and Mark Erbaugh explained that we would meet all the different professors and find somebody to work with whose focus matched our research interests. Touring all of the different laboratories, and meeting these professors, I began to see an academic culture very different from ours at Makerere. Professors welcomed us into their laboratories and were eager to work with us. Their attitudes towards students

were completely different. Whereas my own masters degree back at Makerere had dragged on for five years, professors here at Ohio State were always proactively prodding and following up to make sure their students were meeting their deliverables on time.

Here, students were seen as an asset rather than a liability. It was through the work of students that academics could continue to publish and drive their own careers forward, while supporting the next generation in their own development. It was a beautiful system, and it worked.

I had really wanted to work on fungal physiology but my colleagues back in Uganda at Makerere were having none of it. I had been sent to Ohio State to work on priority research areas for Uganda, and fungal physiology was not one of them. Uganda was, however, suffering from a terrible outbreak of maize leaf blight disease, commonly called northern corn leaf blight, and to this my superiors in Uganda directed my focus. I was to work on plant pathology, focusing on maize.

For this, I was sent to the university's research station in Wooster, Ohio, to work with Prof. Pat Lipps, a big, tall Amish man who ploughed his own fields at home with oxen. Pat helped me to gather a very strong doctoral advisory committee, which included Prof. Larry Madden, an outstanding expert in disease epidemiology. Pat had never been outside America, but when I did my research there was provision for him to visit Uganda with me. When he came to Uganda, though, unfortunately his baggage was lost; and because he was so huge and tall we had to seek out tailors in Kampala who could make up clothing for him. While in my country he visited the Mt Elgon region which, to him, was the most beautiful place he had ever seen. Shame on me, I had not even noticed that such beautiful places existed in my country – except of course for the beautiful scenery of Olyanai!

I was working very hard, taking a heavy course load and reading incessantly to stay on track with my PhD. My life as a student was

very frugal. My USAID scholarship provided US$400 a month for living expenses, and I scrimped and saved wherever I could, sometimes eating in soup kitchens in order to be able to send money home to my wife through Mark at the MFAD office. In addition to supporting herself and our children, my wife always found a way to send money, food and other supplies to my family in Olyanai, who were suffering under the insurgency. It took all her resourcefulness but she found young people, especially young women, who could carry these precious resources to Olyanai for her, thereby providing an important lifeline to my community. That is one of the reasons why, to this day, my wife is loved so dearly in our community.

To me, the thrift stores of Ohio offered an inconceivable wealth of things to buy: quality sheets, bedding, clothing and shoes. I stocked up when I could, and took these luxuries to the MFAD office as well, to be couriered back to my family by the USAID staff travelling back and forth between Ohio and Uganda. Then too, come the end of the term the American students would throw their old clothing into the dustbins – and we would go and fish these clothes out of the dustbins to send home.

Friday evenings were the one special time I allowed myself a proper meal and visited a local restaurant to enjoy a plate heaped with meat, potatoes and fresh vegetables. The restaurant staff came to know my predicament and often would send me home with packages of leftovers to supplement my diet during the rest of the week.

But oh, how we missed our Ugandan food! I remember one instance in particular: returning from my research visit back to Uganda with Pat Lipps, I was the courier for the two wives of a colleague and fellow Ugandan, Peter Esele, who was stationed at a university in Texas. The women had, via me, sent over home-brewed millet beer and fish in groundnut sauce. Once back in Ohio, I mailed the package off to Texas through the postal system. It was intercepted by the authorities, however, who were suspicious of its

contents, and I was confronted in the department at the university by dour-looking uniformed men holding the package I had sent. Once they were satisfied with my explanation of what it was, they helped me package it up again, and it was sent safely onwards to my colleague in Texas – a small yet beautiful reminder of life back home.

I also enjoyed my student life, and spent many happy evenings and weekends with colleagues, always in the quest for cheap beer. Mark Erbaugh and I became good friends and have remained so to this day, despite our political differences (Mark being a die-hard conservative Republican, while my views always tended towards socialism). He was always amused that the beer brand I drank was called 'Busch'. Our barroom discussions sometimes grew so heated that we were kicked out of several different establishments!

Another time, I visited the liquor store with a Brazilian friend of mine (Nilceu de Nazareno), who had access to one of the USAID vehicles. We loaded this truck up with beer and later were surprised to learn that somebody had phoned the university to complain that we were misusing State property. For us, this was an important introduction to a way of thinking, and a new set of values around accountability and responsibility. In our home countries, we would not have thought twice about making use of any of the resources at our disposal – whether government property or otherwise – for any purpose that suited us. But the rules were different here, and it showed in the ways that people respected the systems that made their society function.

Wooster was a beautiful place, especially in the wintertime. Although I struggled with the cold, I loved the winters, when the trees were stripped of their leaves and snow blanketed the flat plains. This wide, open landscape reminded me of our swamp back home in Olyanai, and helped relieve my homesickness.

One day, an older friend of mine, John Hakiza, suggested we walk out to visit the local graveyard, a beautiful and well-tended

place with old weathered gravestones marking the burial sites of army generals and doctors, husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, dating back to the 1800s. He told me, 'Look at all the names of all of these people who were so busy doing this and that. Today, this is all that remains of them. All of these people did not finish what they wanted to do, and now their jobs are being done by others.'

I understood what he was telling me. I was working too hard, but I could not do it all. I had to learn to trust that others would be there to carry on the work and do the things I couldn't do myself. I have always tried to remember those wise words. Just as my mother had held me in her arms when I was an infant, surrounded by my grandmothers, watching the threads that had adorned our necks float away into the swamp, I now remembered that lesson: every life journey is an unfinished journey. And when you or I or anyone else is gone, there will be others preparing to take our places and carry on our work.

My life in the USA provided me with an important new perspective. Perhaps part of my life's journey would be to change the way certain things were done back home at Makerere. At Ohio State University, I was part of a vibrant academic culture that pushed people to publish and perform, nurturing younger researchers in the process. I found myself taking part in this life – attending the convenings of vibrant professional academic networks and societies, meeting people and being exposed to their ideas and ways of thinking – which then in turn enriched my own.

Attending these gatherings widened my horizons. One small episode I will never forget: at one annual meeting or another, perhaps in Chicago, I met an older man in the anteroom where presenters could check their slides before giving their presentations. This man wanted to review his presentation but didn't know how to use the slide projector. I helped him prepare but did not ask his name. Moments later, I watched this man standing on the stage

and giving his keynote address. It was Norman Borlaug, the Nobel Prize-winning agronomist/plant breeder, whose research on Mexican maize had helped to kick off the Green Revolution. I had just helped a leading world scientist, without even knowing it! Indeed we stand on the shoulders of giants.

It struck me some time later that we had no major forum for gathering African scientists and students together to exchange their knowledge professionally. In the United States, there were loads of professional societies, each one producing its own journal: the American Phytopathology Society, or the Society of Agronomy publishing the widely renowned *Journal of Agronomy*. Our African scientists were struggling to publish in some of these journals. But nobody was focusing on trying to develop a reputable journal or forum to enable scholars to publish and meet one another on their own continent. It was an idea that sparked in my mind. I said to myself, 'When I go home, I will create one!'

Looking back on my time in the US, I feel that I benefited greatly from my exposure to a culture of academic excellence, a culture of doing quality work, and especially a culture of love for students. The day after I graduated with my PhD in hand, I boarded a flight and travelled back to Uganda, thoroughly exhausted but eager to continue the next chapter of my life, contributing in whatever way I could to building my beloved home country, Uganda.

9

CHAPTER 9

CHANGE INSURGENTS

My return from the USA was bittersweet. Wonderful as it was to be reunited with my family, it was an adjustment for all of us. I was a stranger to my daughter Polina, now 4 years old, and when I got into the bed, or even came into the house for that matter, she screamed at me to go away! As Polina gradually got used to me, family life became sweet once more. Having been apart for so long, my wife and I wanted to spend every possible moment together, and she was often in the lab, helping me arrange my experiments and analyse my data. But my time away had clearly taken its toll on us all, and this was sometimes most visible in the small things, like when my wife became irritated with certain phrases I had picked up that sounded too 'American'.

Returning to Olyanai was a traumatic experience.

So many people from the older generation, who were so dear to me, had died in the insurgency, including two of my grandmothers, whom I had not been able to bury. I was shocked to see the devastation in my community. By 1992, it was no longer the proud and united community I remembered, but a community in tatters. All the food was gone. Our cattle were being rustled away by soldiers, rebels and opportunistic groups of Karamojong whose raids now reached all the way to Olyanai. One never knew when bands of soldiers or rebels might attack. Neighbours had turned on

one another. People were shell-shocked. I never thought I would see older women going naked, with only their lower parts covered because they lacked even a simple piece of cloth.

Luckily, I could frequently borrow a vehicle from the Faculty of Agriculture at Makerere University to rush to Olyanai and drop off food – often just medium-grade *posho* and beans, which we bought in bulk so it could stretch further among all the hungry households. It was not safe for me to spend the night, but at least I could visit the graves of people I had loved so much. My community was enduring terrible suffering. The stories I heard only increased my feelings of bitterness. For instance, one day, while I was still away in the USA, soldiers had found my father alone at his homestead. Our cows, which the soldiers were no doubt looking for, were not there but were hidden some distance away in the swamp. And so these angry soldiers had instead forced my father at gunpoint to carry a heavy load of barbed-wire fencing on his head and walk more than two kilometres to the main road. We were lucky he had survived this ordeal.

Returning to Makerere brought many challenges too. Gone were the abundant resources, the focused sense of purpose and the productive academic culture that had supported me during my time at Ohio State University. Ironically, while I was training abroad, I had only thought of coming home; but now I was home, it was difficult to figure out exactly how and where to dig in and work towards building the country that I loved so much.

Slowly, however, I began to find my feet. I was fortunate to find two opportunities for launching my academic career back at Makerere. The MFAD project was able to extend to me a US$5,000 grant, which provided me with some resources to start my research. Subsequent to that, I landed a US$30,000 post-doctoral fellowship called the African Career Award from the Rockefeller Foundation, which proved to be the beginnings of my long-standing relationship with that organisation.

Having just completed my PhD in maize pathology to address Uganda's crop disease outbreak, I was keen to continue my work on maize. However, my first MFAD proposal was rejected. I was told that maize was the mandate of the research institutions, not the university. They asked me to come up with something else, and so I proposed doing a survey to map the landscape of crop diseases across Uganda in order to get a grasp of the overall constraints and priorities nationwide.

That is where my work began, and my findings led me to a very important realisation. I saw that Solanum potatoes (commonly called 'Irish' potatoes) were becoming an important food crop in southwestern Uganda – and yet very little research had been done on potato production in that area. Here was an opportunity to contribute important research towards building local food security. There was just one problem, however. Having done an entire course on Solanum potatoes at Ohio State, I had thrown out all my notes afterwards, thinking that potatoes were not relevant to the Ugandan context. How narrow-minded I had been, looking back! I had to beg my former classmates to photocopy their notes and courier them to me. And I went to the International Potato Centre offices in Nairobi to learn more about potatoes and the research issues involved. But I had learned my lesson: never assume something is not relevant just because you can't see its relevance from your own limited and current perspective.

By the time of my post-doctoral funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, I had found another crop to work on: cowpeas. This was an important dryland food security crop, as both the leaves and the peas provided a nutritious food source to ward off hunger in drought-prone areas. Indeed, I had grown up eating cowpeas in Olyanai. But once again my limited perspective set me on the wrong track initially. I was proposing to work on testing different varieties of cowpeas at Kabanyolo, which was not a cowpea-growing area at all! Fortunately, however, the Rockefeller

Foundation programme had retained an advisor called Steven Carr, who had previously worked at the World Bank and knew Uganda's agricultural landscape far better than I did. Steven took me to Teso, near my own home, and suggested that was where I should start my work.

As my post-doctoral efforts got under way, I also began scheming with two colleagues to put some of the newfangled ideas gleaned from my time in the US into practice at Makerere. My colleagues, Dr Morris Ogenga Latigo, an entomologist, and Dr Mateete Bekunda, a soil scientist, had experienced similar frustrations to mine in our academic system, and were similarly motivated to work towards changing that system. I remember Dr Ogenga Latigo, who had also endured an unnecessarily lengthy process in getting his masters, telling us, 'We can change the face of how things are done in this university'.

We decided to work as a team to shift common practices of teaching and student supervision. We introduced the idea of holding regular tutorials to bring graduate students together, engage them with one another and build their debating skills. It was difficult at first, as our seniors were often resistant to our ideas and felt we were stepping on their toes. But eventually some of these interactive teaching and discussion formats we were proposing started to take hold.

Inspired by an academic culture I had discovered in the USA that revolved around building scientific communities and producing scientific publications, we also collaborated on launching the African Crop Science Society, along with its counterpart journal, the *African Crop Science Journal*. We travelled to Nairobi, home of the *East African Journal of Agriculture and Forestry*, to learn the nuts and bolts of journal publication. I remember loading copies of our first issue from the printers into Dr Bekunda's tiny car, and feeling that unique excitement that comes when something you have worked so hard to conceptualise and produce is birthed into

the world. Both the African Crop Science Society and its companion journal remain vibrant to this day.

As the Rockefeller Foundation's FORUM programme was being launched, African universities were facing their worst moments, heightened by political and economic crises in several countries and exacerbated further by the World Bank's structural adjustment policies, which discouraged governments from investing in higher education. The Foundation, having in the 1980s already envisioned Africa as headed towards a food crisis, was wanting to borrow lessons from the Green Revolution, which had transformed agriculture in parts of Asia, Latin America and Mexico. In working towards building food security in Africa, the Foundation understood clearly that the aims of building people and their institutions were inseparable: without strong institutions, academics could not be supported in producing quality work; yet, in order to become capable of producing quality work, academics needed strong institutions to train from in the first place. The Rockefeller Foundation was particularly interested in supporting a new cadre of scientists within African universities as change agents who could respond to the looming food insecurity crises. This thinking had been the seed of the FORUM programme, the precursor to RUFORUM.

By the time FORUM was launched, in 1993, my initial post-doctoral work on cowpeas had prepared me to apply for a grant. Four cohorts were selected as FORUM's initial grantees: there was Prof. George Kanyama-Phiri working on soil and nutrient management in Malawi; in Uganda, there was my cowpea research, and Dr Bekunda was working on bananas; and in Zimbabwe, Prof. Sheu Mpepereki was working on soybeans. None of our initial proposals were top-notch, but once again we were lucky to have support from Steven Carr in developing our ideas.

We needed to travel around the country, collecting different cowpea varieties to test in the field and learn more about their

different qualities, to guide us in producing improved crop varieties. As with the millet research I had done for my masters, it would be critical to understand the qualities that farmers looked for in their cowpea varieties. This provided us with an opportunity to build linkages with communities that would expand how we conceptualised a university's role in society.

In my cowpea research, I was helped by Steven to recognise the importance of focusing on building the university's outreach efforts in order that our work might make the leap from the ivory tower to the farming communities where it could actually be useful. The Rockefeller programme put particular emphasis on addressing the needs of smallholder farmers. As academics, we were perfectly competent in developing new varieties of cowpeas and other technologies but knew little about promoting them to farmers; our universities had not been set up to do developmental research or link with extension service delivery. We still needed to learn how to build those relationships in the research and extension systems as well as, of course, with farmers.

We linked with the Ministry of Agriculture and the national research system in three cowpea-growing districts: Kumi, Soroti and Palisa. Our contacts there guided us to several farmer groups, including a women's group from Bukedea in Kumi district, led by an extraordinary woman named Norah Ebukalin, along with her husband, the Reverend Sam Ebukalin.

Working with this organised and determined group of women was one of the most uplifting parts of my life. The community had been hit hard by the insurgency and were now determined to rebuild their lives. While this was a traditional area for growing cowpeas and groundnuts, the insurgency had brought all farming to a halt. As my own family back in Olyanai continued to struggle and suffer, I think it relieved some of my anxiety and bitterness to be working with communities here where peace was returning and people were facing the future with such energy and hope.

Norah Ebukalin had galvanised a group of 12 women in Bukedea, and this group called themselves P'KWI: the Popular Knowledge Women's Initiative. Meeting this group for the first time to discuss ways we could collaborate, I took my seat on a plastic chair under a large mango tree adjacent to Norah's house, looked at the 12 expectant faces gathered around in a circle, and felt self-doubt arising in me. I could feel these women appraising me and my colleagues, probably rightly asking themselves: 'Is this somebody we should partner with? Will this be something worth my time?' I started to question my own objectives of developing cowpea varieties in this area. I remember wondering if I had really come to Bukedea with something that could contribute to helping these people develop and move forward.

There were so many questions. How would we build trust and come to a genuine understanding of what each party could offer? What, in fact, did we want to do together – and what would our respective roles be in working towards those goals? What were our mutual expectations? What knowledge did each party have, and how could we combine our different knowledges towards developing collaborative research processes that could improve people's lives?

Of course it would take us many years to answer these questions – but Norah embraced our collaboration with an open-hearted willingness that also helped me to have faith that we would find a way forward. The community's initial requests were simple; they needed cowpea and groundnut seeds, cassava stems, and basic farming implements, which we were easily able to provide.

We dispatched our first crops of students to Bukedea and the other two communities we were collaborating with, to begin with planting and testing different cowpea varieties in their fields. At Kabanyolo, we had already tested cowpea materials gathered from around the country and also brought in from IITA (the non-profit International Institute of Tropical Agriculture) in Ibadan, Nigeria.

Thus, we had already identified about 10 or 12 varieties that performed reasonably well, including a variety we called the MU93: for 'Makerere University 1993', symbolising when we initiated the work on cowpeas.

Testing these varieties in the field with Norah Ebukalin and her P'KWI colleagues provided us researchers and students alike with rich opportunities to learn and to shift our thinking. Norah was a tough teacher. Some of the students had thought they could just come to the village and make field observations – but Norah was having none of it. She insisted the students spend their days digging, weeding and fetching water alongside the farmers.

Many of my best and most memorable students started out working on our cowpea research: Richard Edema, Grace Abalo, Paul Nampala, Jeninah Karungi, Prossy Isubikalu, Claire Mukankunzi, Antony Sabiiti and Bosco Bua, among others. Edema was working on cowpea diseases, while Abalo initiated a cowpea-breeding project and collaborated with Mukankunzi; Nampala and Karungi focused on insect pests causing cowpea diseases, while Isubikalu and Sabiiti looked at socio-economic issues, including studying farmer–university engagement. These students comprised the first cohort of masters students; subsequently, others built on the work of these pioneer students, broadening the scope of their work.

I always say that the universities must 'learn to unlearn' – a phrase borrowed from the work of my colleague Dr Paul Kibwika. Working side by side with farmers, we could appreciate the deep knowledge they held. We were not the experts here in the field: the farmers were. They were the ones who knew how to space their plantings of groundnuts in such a way that the aphids would not devour them. They were the ones who knew how to protect their crops from pests without using chemicals. They were the ones who really understood which cowpea varieties – and later on, which sorghum varieties – would grow best in their home soil. It was very

humbling to realise how much knowledge these farmers possessed, once we researchers developed the eyes to see what they were capable of and how we could support these efforts.

Norah became a great mentor to all of us researchers and students; she helped us to understand the farmer's perspective. I remain humbled by the way Norah and her colleagues embraced our students as their own. The students became their daughters and sons. All told, I believe more than 50 of our students worked with P'KWI over the years. I will never forget one conference, in particular, where one of our students won an award for giving the top presentation – and the P'KWI farmers attending that conference got up and danced for joy because their daughter had won!

As we made strides in our research, I grew increasingly driven. In retrospect, I believe I became so focused on gathering results that I was blind to some of the dangers my students faced. While the insurgency had largely simmered down, there was still intermittent fighting and the odd rebel attack. And on at least one occasion my students in the field were exposed. When gunmen raided one of the villages, three of my students – Jeninah Karungi, Prossy Isubikalu and Paul Nampala – had to flee to the bush with the rest of the community to take shelter. In particular, Jeninah Karungi, being from southwestern Uganda, would have been seen as the tribal enemy in that area. Our research was right on the cutting edge of a very unstable society, and I still question myself deeply: did I unnecessarily put my students at risk?

These were our early capacity-building efforts, geared towards pursuing new ways of linking the knowledge of farmers, academics and the national agricultural research system (NARS) towards changing society for the better. It was a long process, but it did bear fruit. Most of the farmers had lost their cowpea seeds in the insurgency, and were happy to recover their old varieties as well as test out new ones. For us, their discussions comparing these different varieties were illuminating: 'This one is nice, it has big

seeds, but it doesn't store well', or 'but it isn't sweet', or 'but the insects attack it'. We appreciated how the farmers differentiated between the varieties. For instance, there was one black cowpea variety, with big seeds, which they wanted to grow, even though they didn't like the taste, because it would sell well at the market, especially in Kenya. For their own consumption, they preferred a small-seeded, tastier variety they called *echirukukwai*.

We had started with cowpeas, which were fast-growing and nutritious, providing edible leaves within three weeks of growth. They were the perfect food for young mothers with infants. However, as Norah pointed out, farmers did not want to eat cowpeas alone. They ate cowpeas mixed with groundnuts. And they also needed millet, sorghum and cassava to mix the *atap* flour for their bread. All these crops had been completely wiped out. But when we came to the community with our work on a single commodity, it opened the door to bringing in a greater diversity of crops and ultimately to expanding P'KWI's scope beyond basic food security, to developing members' livelihoods in vibrant new ways.

Visiting P'KWI today, I am awed by how this community has moved itself forward, developing different avenues of value addition and, in the process, becoming a prosperous centre of learning that draws students from across the globe. Norah herself has travelled widely, inspiring audiences around the world with P'KWI's success story. The group now produces their own brand of organic sunflower oil in a modern factory they collectively own, earning profits sometimes as high as US$2,000 a month. P'KWI has now expanded to reach more than 2,500 households, and continues to grow. As Norah Ebukalin herself told me recently, her greatest pride is in seeing how the community is succeeding in retaining its young people. Instead of leaving Bukedea to seek scarce jobs in the city, she says, young people see a future for this community and want to be part of it. 'Our minds have been transformed,' Norah says. 'We want to remain being a place for

transformation, not only for P'KWI but for our young people and the community.'

Back in the early 2000s, however, as the future looked brighter in Bukedea, things were taking a turn for the worst back in my home village of Olyanai. In the early 1980s, my wife and I had built two houses in Soroti town, rental income from which enabled us to contribute towards building and refurbishing some of the local schools around Olyanai. Not long after the first insurgency was stamped out, however, my community was suffering once more, this time from the incursions of rebel leader Joseph Kony, whose Lord's Resistance Army was wreaking havoc throughout northern and eastern Uganda.

Our Soroti houses gave my family somewhere to escape when remaining at Olyanai became untenable. As that moment arrived, we divided up our clan, sending some of the women and children, as well as our few remaining cows that had not been rustled away, across to the other side of the swamp to live with our Adipala clan, repairing the breach that had separated our family over several generations, from the time my great-grandfather had escaped the wrath of his clan and settled his family in Olyanai. But we remembered our relatives, and in our hour of need that is where some people ran.

The rest of my family fled on foot across the swamp to the two Soroti houses. As my auntie Ada Adongo recalls it, the government forces were bombing the village from helicopter gunships. She fled along with several of the youths from the compound, who were dragging her by the arms and shouting at her to run faster as they crossed the swamp. Those people who had not been quick enough to flee were soon killed by Kony's soldiers and through the bombing by the NRM government.

More than 300 relatives and neighbours gathered in each of the two Soroti houses, and many of them stayed there for nearly two years. My colleagues at the university and I would load up the

Faculty of Agriculture's vehicle with *posho* and beans, or sweet potatoes, and rush to those two Soroti houses, always afraid of being shot up either by Kony's rebels or the government forces. The houses were overrun with refugees. The women slept inside the house, while the men kept watch outside. My relatives had dug three pit latrines in the backyard. The hunger, the stench and the squalor were unbearable, but at least my family survived and were able to finally return home in 2004.

Shuttling back and forth between the horrors facing my community and the life of an up-and-coming academic, attending international conferences and giving papers, sometimes felt surreal. But a number of my colleagues at Makerere were in similar situations, and their comradeship lent me strength.

Through FORUM, we were building the beginnings of a network and culture of excellence in research. Bharati Patel, the Rockefeller Foundation programme officer who oversaw FORUM, pushed us relentlessly to publish in the best journals and drive our students to work, think and perform. Nothing but the best would satisfy her, and we all benefited from her tenacity. At Bharati's insistence, all the FORUM principal investigators (PIs) and students gathered once a year to present their work to one another. These gatherings fostered our relationships with one another, and stimulated our thinking as well as a healthy sense of competition among us. And Bharati Patel was always there with her hammer: 'You must push! You must publish! You must perform! You can't be second-rate scholars!' We (including Bharati) were supported by a number of mentors, including Malcolm Blackie, a former dean of the Faculty of Agriculture at the University of Zimbabwe, who was also working with the Rockefeller Foundation. They brought in a very energetic American scientist, Paul Woomer, to support the research teams.

Looking back on it, I was lucky indeed to find colleagues, both at Makerere and further afield, who shared my ambitions

of improving the quality of postgraduate education, fostering the quality of African journal publications, engaging with communities in our research, and spreading a culture of excellence through our burgeoning African networks.

The cowpea research had shaped my outlook as a researcher. It also influenced me to try changing the university's approach to research and strengthen our community engagement programmes. Wanting our vice-chancellor, Prof. John Ssebuwufu, to champion this approach, I took him to Bukedea to show him that Makerere was not just an ivory tower but that we were in the field interacting with the farmers. I was very gratified, several years later, when Makerere came out with its I@Mak (Innovations at Makerere) programme, which pushed researchers and students to go out to communities to design programmes and work with the communities.

Thinking of how our work on cowpeas had brought us into partnership with the farmers and the NARS, and had expanded our understanding of knowledge-building and capacity-development processes, I was eager to share these lessons with our broader university community. My own idea of what it meant to be an academic had shifted completely. I was no longer a pure scientist, but was looking at our scientific endeavours through an expanded developmental lens. I was learning to unlearn, and this process left me in no doubt that if more of our young academics and researchers could be similarly equipped to see through expanded lenses, we would all have the potential to become not simply change agents but *change insurgents* in our institutions and our societies as a whole.

CHAPTER 10

THE BEGINNING OF RUFORUM

If you are thinking a year ahead – sow a seed.
If you are thinking 10 years ahead – plant a tree.
If you are thinking 100 years ahead – educate the people.

I no longer recall exactly how and when I discovered these words, sometimes referred to as a Chinese proverb and at other times attributed to Kuan Tzu, a 500 BCE Chinese Tao patriarch. But when I found myself in the running for the job of coordinating the independent new network of universities that RUFORUM was to become, the wisdom and far-sightedness of these words spoke to me from across the millennia. With my own community having been ravaged for so long by the senseless barbarity of ethnic and political conflict, I loved the simple vision of building for the future, and the resonance of these words with our work on cowpeas in Bukedea and elsewhere.

That work had given us a decade's worth of experience, not only in planting the seeds of collaboration with communities but also in thinking and engaging more deeply with questions of building our students' capacity to become leaders, change makers and builders of society. Similar processes had been happening across our FORUM community, the programme having run for 10 years (from 1993 to 2002 inclusive). During that time, while advancing new models

working side by side with communities to ensure our research was relevant and impactful, FORUM had built knowledge and community within and across 10 different African universities in 5 African countries: Makerere University in Uganda; the University of Malawi; the University of Zimbabwe and Africa University in Zimbabwe; Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique; and the University of Nairobi, Kenyatta University, Egerton University, Moi University and the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology in Kenya.

FORUM was, however, a grant programme – and like almost every grant programme, it had a limited life span. By 2002, the Rockefeller Foundation was looking to devolve FORUM's ownership. The programme had been ground-breaking and impactful, building and shaping the careers of more than 300 young African scientists. But capacity building is slow and painstaking work – and very expensive. The Foundation had new leadership and new priorities to invest in.

Nevertheless, the vice-chancellors of the 10 participating universities had all seen the benefits of FORUM, and all agreed that one of their institutions should provide a home for some new iteration of the programme to continue. There was also concern at that time that the cost of training one MSc student at a FORUM member university was quite high in comparison to training a similar student at another university such as Chang Mai University in Taiwan.

The Rockefeller Foundation then commissioned a team of consultants – David Norman from Kansas State University; David Ngugi from the University of Nairobi and ICRAF; and Harris Mule, who had been Kenya's first Permanent Secretary of the Treasury – to study the prospects and assess whether one of the universities that had been part of FORUM was suitably equipped to host its continuation. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, their study confirmed Makerere as the most likely candidate. Prof. John Ssebuwufu, who was still our vice-chancellor, had been an avid supporter of

the programme. Over FORUM's lifespan, our institution had taken some 60% of all the grants and had also garnered the highest numbers of students and publications. In addition to heading up the cowpea research, I had been increasingly involved in coordinating programme activities, and so when it came to nominating candidates to lead the new entity, my name was very naturally among those put forward.

Things were moving fast. During a series of meetings held in Nairobi, it was decided that the new organisation would be called the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture, and that a fully independent secretariat would be established at Makerere. We had the full support of the Ugandan government as well as the 10 vice-chancellors. Although I had always studiously avoided taking on administrative duties at the university, I was not at all averse to being considered for the job, especially because it would allow me to remain at Makerere and, as I foolishly believed at the time, continue with my own academic work in the Faculty of Agriculture.

The morning I sat in front of the interview panel at the Kampala Sheraton Hotel, in February 2004, however, I was still reeling from the effects of a very different sort of misunderstanding. In preparation for my interview, I had gone for a haircut. Unfortunately, languages have never been my strength. I only know my mother language, Kumam, and English. In spite of having lived in the environs of Kampala for decades and being married to a Muganda woman, I had never properly learned the Buganda language. So when I told the barber *'katono'*, instructing him as I thought to give my hair just a slight trim, I did not realise I was actually asking him to shave my head completely bald!

The shock I got when I saw myself in the mirror was nothing compared to the wrath of my wife when I returned home that evening. In that moment, I saw all of her toughness emerge as she subjected me to a merciless tongue-lashing. How she abused me!

All the vice-chancellors from the 10 universities were present at the interview the following morning, with Prof. Ngugi and Ms Wanjiku Kiragu representing the Rockefeller Foundation. The recruitment process was being handled by the firm Deloitte & Touche. I believe I was the last of the five shortlisted candidates to be interviewed.

When I entered the interview room, Prof. Ssebuwufu nearly fell off his chair laughing as he saw my shiny new bald head.

The vice-chancellors were to receive an additional shock from this bald-headed candidate. Aided by my students Moses Osiru and Patrick Okori, I had prepared a presentation for the occasion, showcasing my humble roots with a photograph of the same grass-thatched hut that I had always been told was the scene of my birth. I was wanting to use my own story to illustrate the profound yet simple truth contained in the Kuan Tzu quotation: education is what will sustain development.

Preparing for my interview, I had been struck anew by the foresight of my mother and aunties, who had invested so much in me. Only decades later did the fruits of their sacrifice and labour pay off, helped through the hands of so many other family members and teachers along the way: there had been Mr Pius Epau in primary school, and Prof. Alphonse Emechebe at Makerere, and Prof. John Mugerwa after that; and I was now a fully fledged researcher, not only supporting and providing for my own extended family in various ways but also helping to build food and nutrition security in my country, and educating and mentoring the next generation of scientists.

At first, the interview committee was shocked by the photo I had shared with them. But as I built the story, they could recognise that I was somebody who had come from humble beginnings yet had been fortunate in finding opportunities to develop a vision, gain experience, and amass a track record of delivery. Asked why I had applied for the job, I highlighted the issue of food

and nutrition security. I still don't know how I was able to make all the connections, although in recent years the world had been shocked by images of famine in Ethiopia and elsewhere. What did it say about our values as a society that we could stand by and watch our fellow Africans starve? I felt clearly and strongly that as Africans we needed to learn to stand up and do things differently as a continent: we needed to find our own unity, just as we needed to tackle our challenges of food and nutrition insecurity. In my mind, these two issues were connected – and the work of building new generations of young scientists equipped with the knowledge, passion, competencies and creativity to be change makers in their societies was key to meeting these two interconnected challenges.

Through the Green Revolution in India, Mexico and elsewhere, societies had been transformed completely by visionary leaders making long-term commitments to building robust research systems that would ensure food security for their populations. People were of course integral to the functioning of these systems and institutions. Working as part of our small, dedicated cadre of scientists and students at Makerere and across the FORUM network, I had glimpsed what becomes possible with a sense of togetherness. I was sure that FORUM contained the seeds of something that could grow to become much larger and more transformative. Over the coming years, that quotation from Kuan Tzu would become one of my guiding lights.

In the end, however, what clinched the RUFORUM job for me was the mundane fact that I had attended a short course in leadership during my time at Ohio State University. Then, I hadn't understood why my American supervisors were bothering me to go on this short course in leadership; but now it became a fundamental qualification that secured me the appointment in RUFORUM. My interlocutors knew that I had never been a head of department, or a dean or vice-chancellor. But they did recognise that I could get things organised and deliver results, abilities that had no doubt

been bolstered by my attending a leadership workshop more than a decade earlier.

Within a week of the interview, I was offered the job, which I was to officially start on 1 April 2004, and tasked with establishing the Secretariat. With my appointment as the regional coordinator of RUFORUM, I effectively gained 10 new bosses, in the form of each vice-chancellor representing each of the member universities in our network. The first instructions they gave me were two-fold: I was to set up a university network to support the training of students from the member universities; and I was not to fail.

'Africa is full of failures,' my new bosses reminded me. 'Don't let us down!'

I had taken the job with the understanding that RUFORUM had secured start-up funding from the Rockefeller Foundation. What I did not realise was that no funds had actually been committed. The coffers were empty, and it fell to me to lead the process of developing a new proposal to secure the seed funding from the Foundation to establish RUFORUM. It would take us more than six months to develop the proposal and secure those funds and that process was a big learning curve for me. I called on the likes of my student Patrick Okori and my colleagues Dr Morris Ogenga Latigo and Dr Mateete Bekunda to help me formulate the proposal. But when we sent it to the Foundation it did not receive the response we were expecting: nobody was interested. Finally, Dr John Lynam, a senior Rockefeller Foundation official, agreed to give us some money from his soil science programme.

As we went back and forth ironing out the details of the proposal, Prof. Ssebuwufu asked me to proceed with setting up the new office. 'If you don't act now,' he told me, 'it will indicate that Uganda is not ready to host this office, and that Makerere has failed.' He must have known that appealing not only to my sense of national and continental drive but also to my institutional pride would give him leverage.

There was a lot of work to be done and I knew I could not do it alone. I had brought three staff members on board: Hellen Kongai, who was a secretary in the Crop Science Department; Sarah Nagitta, a hardworking and diligent young woman who came from the Faculty of Agriculture to help with photocopying and other administrative duties; and driver Salongo Lubega, a laconic and very reliable army veteran, who also came from the Faculty of Agriculture. Because RUFORUM had no funds with which to pay them, I used my own family savings to cover their salaries. We often even shared food off the same plate. Fortunately, I was still a lecturer in the Faculty, and so I still had access to office support and other resources from the Faculty. But it was not easy.

The RUFORUM office was housed temporarily in a refurbished flat in the Lincoln House on campus, but a house at 151 Garden Hill Road had been earmarked as our permanent home. Previously, the house had been the residence of a former vice-chancellor, Prof. Senteza Kajubi. The trouble was that the property was still occupied, serving as the university's in-kind contribution towards a project run by the Italian Embassy in the Faculty of Technology, and the visiting professors associated with that project were living there.

As much as the university leadership wanted to reclaim the house for the Secretariat, they feared jeopardising their relationship with the Italians, who did not want to move out. Try as he might, the vice-chancellor couldn't chase away the Italians. It required, it seemed, the intervention of a feisty woman. The university's lawyer, Jane-Francis Nabuwanuka, was diligent and persistent, calling and visiting the Italians with repeated requests to vacate the building. But to no avail. Finally, using her legal weapon, she found grounds to evict them on a technicality; because the house had been provided to them as office space, and they were using it as accommodation, the embassy was in breach of its contract with the university and would have to leave, she informed them.

After months of diplomatic and legal wrangling, the house was finally vacated, and I assumed a new professional role: begging! The house had been left in a very dilapidated state. The roof was caving in and needed to be replaced entirely. When it rained the water leaked in. Of course, we had no money for refurbishment. Fortunately, I could draw on my relationships with several different builders and artisans who had worked on building my own new house in Nalya. I went to Uganda Clays for roofing materials and was lucky that the new manager was my former UPC political colleague. I pleaded with him to give me the materials on credit. I persuaded a carpenter and a tile worker also to take deferred payment. And I was provided with floor and bathroom tiles on credit by a young Indian man whose father I had worked with before, and who was establishing his own business. I assured all of them that they would be paid. I just didn't realise how long that would take!

In those crucial first months at RUFORUM, I decided to look for experts who could help guide us in creating our new organisation. John Lynam had advised me to develop a strategic plan to underline our vision and goals as an organisation, and gain clarity on what our main activities and approaches should be, as well as the resources we would need. I remembered attending a meeting in Bellagio, Italy, conducted by a man who had impressed me with his deft and skilful facilitation and the quality of his thought. The man was Dr Jürgen Hagman, a German social facilitator experienced in processes of institutional change and gifted in foresight. I was certain this man could help us discover what sort of animal RUFORUM might become. I asked John to introduce us, and subsequently we commissioned Dr Jürgen Hagman to help us develop our strategic plan.

I had in mind, as someone to assist him, a brilliant young man, Patrick Okori, who had worked with me as an undergraduate student on some maize research. Patrick had performed well and so I had persuaded him to stay on at the university, employing him as an

intern working on the *African Crop Science Journal* while I sought funding for him to complete his masters. That had taken more than three years but Patrick had hung in there, in the interim becoming a dear friend of the family and a frequent visitor to our home.

I felt a strong fatherly affection for him and had even provided one of the cows for his dowry when he got married! Now he was finishing his PhD at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences in Uppsala (I had been his co-supervisor, along with my Swedish counterpart Prof. Christina Dixellius). Patrick had never done anything like strategic planning before but he was a very sharp-witted young man and I knew he had potential. I could also see that, as a consultant, Hagman would do the work and then move on; I thought we needed to use this opportunity to build our own capacity to do similar work. So I put forward Patrick to work with Jürgen and be his bag-carrier, so to speak. Thus we could actually build Patrick's capacity while he worked with Jürgen to produce our strategic plan.

Not long after I had started at RUFORUM, in April 2004, the Rockefeller Foundation had asked me to attend a meeting in Abuja, Nigeria, convened by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, with other funding agencies. The Corporation was part of the Partnership for Higher Education in Africa (PHEA), a large consortium of US foundations collaborating to support innovative capacity-building initiatives such as ours in African universities. The meeting was seen as a good opportunity for me to introduce RUFORUM to some of the West African universities. As I recall, hardly any of these universities showed any interest in our new endeavour. But there were three notable exceptions: the University of Cape Coast in Ghana wanted to join RUFORUM; the University of Port Harcourt in eastern Nigeria also later sent a letter requesting assistance in setting up their new Faculty of Agriculture; and Bayero University in northern Nigeria sent a letter seeking partnership on issues of dryland resource management. At the time, nobody

within RUFORUM was thinking much at all about expanding the network, let alone to the other side of the continent – and we would hardly have had the capacity or the resources to do so even if we had wanted to!

Nevertheless, that meeting planted some viable seeds, as all three universities would join our network some years later. The meeting also connected RUFORUM with Andrea Johnson of the Carnegie Corporation, who took an interest in our work and indicated that we could continue to dialogue.

When I returned home from that Abuja meeting, I found my wife in the sitting room of our new home in Nalya, waiting for me. After she had greeted me and served me food, she said she had something to tell me. While I was in Nigeria, she had become ill and visited Dr Kiwanuka in his clinic in Kireka. She had undergone a battery of medical tests, and the results that came back were definitive: she had been diagnosed with advanced cancer of the throat.

My wife told me all of this so calmly that at first I didn't believe it. As she spoke, I could hardly comprehend the significance of what she was saying. She advised me to go and talk to Dr Kiwanuka, whom I had met years before during our holiday teaching at Mukono Secondary School. Only after I had consulted with the doctor did the implications of the diagnosis begin to sink in. He referred me to a South African hospital and recommended that we travel there for treatment.

I was devastated. I had no money and didn't know where to turn for help. I was already living on credit, helping to get the RUFORUM Secretariat established. But I had to do something, so I went to Dr Mateete Bekunda, who was the dean of the Faculty of Agriculture, and asked to borrow US$10,000 from the Faculty. He agreed to lend me the money and I made the arrangements to take my wife to South Africa in the second half of May. She was a tough person and I knew she would not give up without a fight.

With everything that was happening in my personal and professional life, something had to give. I loved teaching and supervising students as a lecturer at Makerere, but it soon became clear that I was stretched beyond my capacity. I could see that I was becoming ineffective as a lecturer and unresponsive to my students. And I was holding onto my position, instead of vacating it to make way for a younger lecturer to begin his or her career. With a heavy heart, I terminated my contract at the Faculty of Agriculture. It was a hard decision. People asked me why I didn't want to remain on the staff. But I knew it would be unfair for me to stay on.

Over the next couple of months, I shuttled back and forth between my wife in South Africa and my duties at the Secretariat. I was very fortunate to link up with Dr Jürgen Hagman; he and his wife took great care of us in South Africa, and hosted us for several weeks.

When we first arrived in South Africa, I was quickly disabused of any doubt I had been holding on to about the severity of my wife's cancer. After some confirmatory tests, I remember being taken into the theatre where the doctors showed me how advanced the cancer was. I wanted to commit suicide. Back in our hotel, my wife saw me standing and looking out the window down at the pavement below. She must have guessed my thoughts because soon after that she insisted we move to a room on the ground floor. What kept me going during those weeks was the thought that I must get her back to Uganda so she could die at home.

While my wife was receiving treatment in South Africa, I had to make one of the most painful decisions of my life. Patrick Okori was scheduled to give his doctoral defence in Sweden and, as his main supervisor from Makerere, I felt it important that I be there. Patrick is one of the brightest and most forward-looking students I have ever worked with and he conducted his doctoral defence brilliantly. I felt so proud and honoured that he was my student. Prof. Dixellius hosted me very hospitably in Sweden and it was only later that I

learned that her father had just passed away. She delayed his burial until Patrick had finished his thesis defence process.

I had left my wife staying with a caretaker in Jürgen Hagman's house. Returning to South Africa, I was shocked to see how swiftly she had deteriorated in my absence. Why had I left her? And why had I left my family all those years before to go and study in the USA? How both of those decisions have haunted me over the years.

Immediately, I left for Kampala to bring my wife's sister to South Africa so that I could be sure that she was being well cared for during those times when I was obliged to travel. Then my wife asked me to take her back to Uganda, and told me that she wanted to be buried in Olyanai. She wrote a short note to our son Milton Edimu, asking him to take care of his brother, Raymond Ekwamu, and his sister, Polina Atim. She also asked him to listen to me and to check in on her father-in-law, Boniface Edimu, and on Ada Adongo. At that point I still hoped that she might survive, or at least live longer.

A couple of weeks had passed since my return from Sweden, and my wife and I went back to the hospital for another check-up. In the theatre, the doctor showed me how, instead of reversing the cancer's progression the medicine being administered was making it spread even faster. He told me there was nothing more they could do, and that now she could only be kept as comfortable as possible until she died. He informed me that she probably had no longer than six months to live.

There was nothing left to do now but make the arrangements to get my wife back to Uganda. At the airport in Johannesburg she was unable to walk. She had to be lifted in a special loading vehicle to board the flight. When we reached home, her mother, my father's brother Ejuru (from my grandfather Eyadu's extended family) and my cousin/sister Anango were all waiting for us. They could see the tears in my eyes and her deplorable state. Although they had tears in their eyes too, I could see them trying to be strong and supportive.

The next few months were the hardest of my life. All I could do was be there for my wife as she neared the end of her life. But there was still the RUFORUM network to think about.

John Lynam at the Rockefeller Foundation had agreed to give us money directly from his soil science programme. Finally, the money came through. It was a US$3.54 million grant, given with an open card, to use as we saw fit to start off RUFORUM as an African-led organisation. It was also made very clear that these would be the only funds forthcoming from Rockefeller. I don't recall whether it was John Lynam or David Ngugi who told me, 'RUFORUM is an African child – you grow up and have to start your own home; your father doesn't look after you anymore.'

From here on, we would have to find our own sources of funding.

To this day, I believe we did more with that seed grant of US$3.54 million than we did with the bigger grants that were to come later. The grant was for three years and, during that time, using that money, we were able to put out three calls for grant proposals, and train close to 350 students – a similar number to what the Rockefeller Foundation had trained over 10 years with US$14.5 million! Under RUFORUM, the size of the competitive grant awards was trimmed to US$60,000 (compared to US$90,000 under FORUM), which provided just the bare essentials for the team leaders (PIs) and a minimum of two masters students to complete their research, including field work with communities.

Although the grant-making would remain a central aspect of RUFORUM activities, we were also starting to expand our thinking about the different roles the network might serve. The strategic planning process was well under way. Fortunately, there was an immediate rapport between Jürgen Hagman and Patrick Okori. I remained as much involved as I could. The duo were travelling to all the different member universities, meeting all the different vice-chancellors, deans, PIs and researchers in the various faculties – many of whom had been involved with FORUM since

its inception – and having deep discussions about the future of the organisation and how it could transition from a donor-funded entity to an independent organisation standing on its own two feet.

Although I am admittedly biased, I believe that this first strategic plan was one of the best documents we have produced as a network. It was visionary thinking and mapped out the growth pathway and key focal points for the network, with concrete targets and budgets. The document clearly conceptualised RUFORUM as a member-based umbrella organisation of the universities. It showed clearly that the Secretariat would not take over or impinge on the roles of the universities. It would be a service centre, positioned to respond to the needs of and demands from the universities. And of course it would have oversight from those universities, in the form of a board of trustees that would be made up for the most part of the vice-chancellors themselves, as the owners of RUFORUM.

The overall architecture of the strategic plan was still taking shape in 2004, when the vice-chancellors all met at the Munyonyo Resort Beach Hotel in Kampala, to begin their negotiations to establish the finer details of and mechanisms for running the organisation and coordinating its activities through the Secretariat. That meeting gave me my first real insight into what it would take to manage relationships with and among all my new bosses.

Before the meeting had even started, two of the vice-chancellors had created an uproar. The hotel was owned by an Indian family, and the entry gate to the hotel was manned by an Indian man. Prof. Levi Nyagura from the University of Zimbabwe, and Prof. Rukudzo Murapa, the vice-chancellor of Africa University, also in Zimbabwe, were indignant about this. They said, 'Is this an independent country? Why do you have an Indian keeping your gate? Where are the Ugandans?' Instead of starting the meeting, they went to the management and demanded that the Indian man be removed from the gate and replaced by a local African. Of course, the Indian man at the gate could very well have been a Ugandan;

but the vice-chancellors would not proceed into the meeting until the man guarding the gate had been replaced with an 'African'.

When the meeting did finally start, the vice-chancellors first took the decision to expand the network beyond its five partner countries. Because the Rockefeller Foundation had been operating only in countries that were of political interest to the USA, we had excluded two countries – Tanzania and Zambia – that were very much linked to the existing programme countries. The vice-chancellors agreed to invite both Sokoine University of Agriculture in Tanzania, and the University of Zambia to join the network. At the time, none of us envisaged that RUFORUM would one day expand to be the continent-wide organisation of 120 member universities that it is today. Nevertheless, the decision to include two new member universities in the organisation set the stage for its later growth.

At that meeting, the vice-chancellors took two other important decisions: first, they created the formal governance organs of RUFORUM, and established that the vice-chancellors themselves would serve on the board of trustees of the organisation; second, because it was envisaged that we would be giving out research grants as FORUM had done, the vice-chancellors created a technical committee that would serve and guide the Secretariat on how to award the grants, because they needed a clear, transparent and competitive process.

In that first meeting, I realised that the vice-chancellors actually enjoy themselves. They drank and drank, and they were still busy drinking in the evenings as I left them to go home. In particular I remember the vice-chancellor of Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique, a radical communist priest who drank with such gusto that the others found it hard to believe he was a priest. (After that meeting of that board, he decided to invite us to Mozambique, and he really looked after his vice-chancellors very well.) I recall him very fondly and in particular for two insights he contributed

that I thought were extremely important for the members of our network to absorb. He was part of the FRELIMO organisation and you could see his radical views. He did not want the Faculty of Agriculture to remain on the university main campus, in the city; he wanted it to be moved out into the rural community. This was actually visionary thinking. He recognised that the universities must be transformative institutions; they should be seen to support the rural transformation from subsistence to really improved livelihoods for the rural communities.

The drive and push from this Mozambique vice-chancellor had a profound impact. It made the vice-chancellors consider, 'What change will RUFORUM and the member universities make to African society, especially the agricultural sector? What would the universities need to do differently and where would the impact be?' After several hours of intensive debate a common position was agreed upon – the desired vision of change:

> *Transforming agriculture in Africa requires innovative research, education and training approaches. The education sector needs to be more connected to the new challenges facing rural communities and needs to build capacity of young people to be part of the transformation of the agricultural sector.*

However, a crisis emerged at that meeting that would only be resolved some three years later. In setting up the constitution it was agreed that there should be only one representative/representation per country. For countries such as Uganda or Malawi or Mozambique that only had one university each, this was a non-issue. But for the vice-chancellor of the University of Nairobi, who considered the university to be a heavyweight among the five Kenyan universities in RUFORUM, and on a par with Makerere, this agreement was completely unacceptable. He said, 'I can't be a member of an organisation where you belittle my university and bring a small university to take over leadership.' That was the beginning of the

crisis, and he actually walked out of the meeting, despite the fact that there were Rockefeller Foundation officials present.

The University of Nairobi vice-chancellor was looking down on the other Kenyan universities in the network, while they, the smaller institutions – colleges and emerging universities – not surprisingly liked the idea that they should be part of the rotation serving on the board.

So, while the other vice-chancellors signed a memorandum at the end of that meeting, the University of Nairobi vice-chancellor stormed out.

The crisis remained until the vice-chancellors met again at Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe in 2007. I had supported the idea of having a smaller board with representation rotating among the universities coming from the same country. At that meeting, however, I chatted with a young man (Brady Walkinshaw) from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), who was the RUFORUM project officer, and who shared some wisdom. 'Having a large board creates a sense of participation and ownership. You are a small organisation, and you need that.'

The next morning, when we met, a motion was put forward to modify the constitution to allow each university to serve on the board of trustees. In order to cut down on expenses, however, it was agreed that each university would have to pay for its own attendance at meetings. This was the compromise solution.

As all of these processes were on the go, my wife's health was continuing to deteriorate. I was in Nairobi with Patrick Okori for one of the multi-stakeholder consultations on the strategic plan, rushing to the airport to return home, when I received a phone call from my wife's brother. 'She has left us,' he said. I rang Patrick, whom I had left with Jürgen Hagman to facilitate the strategic planning process. As I had left home for Nairobi the day before to attend the Kenya strategic consultation process, I had promised my wife that I would go and do this work and come back the next day.

We had been at home, laughing and talking. Her relatives with a priest had come to see her. I hadn't wanted to go to the meeting, but the planning process was at a crucial stage, so I took the risk, not knowing that it was to be the last time I would see her.

I knew that my wife wanted to be buried in my village, Olyanai, instead of in her own ancestral home according to her own culture. We flew back to Entebbe. Patrick accompanied me back to my home in Nalya, and then travelled directly to my village to help with preparations for the funeral. In Kampala, we had a church service for her. I can recall colleagues at Makerere, including Prof. John Ssebuwufu and Dr Israel Kibirige, weeping – as were people from Kabanyolo and Wandegeya. As everyone gathered in St Augustine Chapel (a Catholic church – she was a Catholic who unfortunately got married to this 'unreligious man'), I got up to speak. I couldn't help but share a joke with everyone: 'My wife must be laughing at me now,' I said, 'because finally today she managed to get this man to go to church!'

It had been quite a road, with sadness, happiness and the great opportunity of having had a woman that I loved and who had accepted my simplicity; she had accepted my humble beginnings and believed that we could work together and make a difference – and we had. She had proved to be a development-minded person, fitting in here and treating everybody with respect and dignity, and leaving my village a better place.

And what a tough woman! Rarely have I seen a person who goes across cultures and accepts another culture. Coming from a different ethnic background, she had fitted right in to my culture. My clan and my community had embraced her as one of their own. That is very rare. I think she had a great personality in that regard. She always told me, 'You must look after your in-laws very well, because those are the ones who paid cows for your sisters.'

As I have mentioned, at times I had been jealous of her close and unique relationship with my father as I used to feel that I was

not part of the decision-making. No doubt people still remember her as 'Amoit Edimu' – the Muganda daughter-in-law of Edimu.

The whole of Kaberamaido sent people to build temporary sheds and grass and mud huts around our compound for people to stay in while they attended the funeral. People came in their hundreds, perhaps even thousands, from across the Kaberamaido district to attend. That's also where my connection to the village and to our relatives across the lake came more sharply into focus for me. There were people who walked over 80 kilometres to come for the burial. To them, she was a wife of the clan. It was one of the most humbling things I have experienced. It really moved me, reminding me of some of the long-forgotten values of my community. Having lived the life of an educated person in the city, I had lost some of the immediacy of a sense of connection with my clan. Seeing people so visibly sad – 'We have lost a wife' – brought it home to me. It made me deeply value my connections not only to Olyanai but to the broader district where I come from.

In my culture we have a saying, that if you don't come to other people's burials, when you die you will bury yourself; you'll die alone. In one sense, I felt very alone without my wife. But in another sense I had never felt more strongly a part of my community. 'These are my people; they are part of me.'

Normally, two or three days after the burial the clan meets. You review issues to do with the dead person and any other issues that face the clan. It is accepted that, as far as possible, everybody should be around for that function: men and women, old and young. That is when you are asked to line up behind your father. And this is also what was done after my wife's burial. Like everybody else, I went to line up behind my father; as the eldest I was first in line, with sisters lined up behind me in age order. Then three old women came forward, told me to move back a bit and positioned a woman, Regina Akwango, whom I had only known as one of my clan sisters, directly behind my father. 'This is your father's daughter,'

they told me, 'and she is older than you. She has to stand next to your father.' While all this sorting out was going on, my father did not once look behind him; and later, when it was his time for introducing us, he just said, 'Yes, these are my children,' and went and sat down again!

I stayed at home for three weeks after the burial of my wife. A few weeks after her death we held a memorial service for her. The funeral mass was conducted by the same Dutchman, Father 'Okwichi', who all those years before had denied me my confirmation Bible. Again we had an issue. Because part of my wife's family were Muslims, I also invited one of the Muslims to give a brief prayer. Similarly, I invited an Anglican clergyman to say a short prayer. Then the priest spoke. He told the congregation, 'You have spoiled the prayers but let me now conduct proper prayers!'

It was a beautiful service, with as many as 15 choir groups working in unison. Then the priest went to bless the graveyard of my wife where we had built a permanent shelter over her grave. And he said, 'This is a beautiful resting place; please Prof. and people of Kaberamaido, when I die build a similar place for me.' Sadly, Father 'Okwichi' died in the Netherlands and we did not fulfil his request. Whenever I travel around Lwala Mission, I think about him and how he truly loved and integrated into the Kumam community.

Returning to Kampala after the funeral, I found it very hard to adjust to life without my wife. I threw myself into my work with greater energy than ever, and RUFORUM brought many new challenges to occupy my mind and energies.

CHAPTER 11

EXPANDING OUR VISION

In RUFORUM's early formative years, the strategic planning process was guiding us to think more systemically about what we could accomplish as a network. This was the beginning of our long transition and process of looking beyond grant-based programmatic work and towards becoming a thought leader and catalyst, aiming to have a more far-reaching impact within the African higher education landscape.

The first step in that process was to try and understand more of the particular strengths and potential synergies that existed within our network, and how the unique attributes of the network itself could be harnessed towards the achievement of our new and expanded aims. Working together and connected through RUFORUM, the universities could become something greater than the sum of their parts.

It was quite clear that the universities were at different levels of development, coming from different political and social contexts. Some institutions, like the University of Nairobi, were relatively well endowed. Makerere had been through difficult times under the country's political turmoil, but was recovering and regaining much of its former strength and glory. The University of Zimbabwe had been very strong previously, but the political crisis in that country was now taking its toll. Most of the other universities in

our network, including Bunda College of Agriculture in Malawi, Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique, and the newer Kenyan universities, were all very limited in their resources and capacities.

Several important insights emerged through the strategic planning process. Although we were still a very new and small network, we realised that if we did well other universities would want to join us. This was all the more reason to build our model around galvanising our network in order to make the most of all of its different capacities and pockets of strength to benefit the whole region.

Through the strategic plan, we sought to create an umbrella organisation – a mechanism allowing and encouraging the universities to work together while maintaining their individual identities. Recognising that FORUM's periodic gatherings of all the students and researchers had been instrumental in shaping our sense of identity and togetherness while enabling us to share our learnings and develop a healthy sense of competition with one another, RUFORUM followed this pattern: regular convenings of the member universities through the general assembly, the annual general meetings and the biennial meetings, while working individually at country level. The mechanism we created to allow these universities to not only collaborate at regional level but also work at national levels was the national forums.

The design created RUFORUM as an apex body, with different spokes to reach the member universities and engage them at different levels, thus helping them to pitch their activities towards being responsive to local as well as broader concerns. This three-fold structure of engagement – on the institutional, regional and national levels – would create a platform for universities to identify priority interventions in each country and design activities to implement institutional responses at country level, while also thinking of what could be done commonly at a regional level.

From the earliest days of RUFORUM it was clear that, for higher education to develop, we needed policy support. We were motivated by the experiences from two countries in particular: India and Malaysia. In India, the Green Revolution had worked because of high-level policy support by Indira Gandhi, who had exercised leadership to mobilise the research and extension systems and link the universities with the communities. Malaysia's development miracle of the 1970s and 80s had also featured strategic investments made in higher education that would only pay off in years to come. To me, this policy showed visionary leadership – the same kind of thinking that had inspired me from Kuan Tzu – and it had worked.

We understood that if RUFORUM was really to succeed, we would need our national leaders to support our mission to train new young scientists as action researchers and development practitioners. Unfortunately, as we were building our network, the level of policy support to higher education was actually generally declining across Africa. Nevertheless, within our first year we had convened a ministers' meeting where we presented RUFORUM to government ministers from Uganda, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. It was a first step towards working with these governments and forging an ongoing relationship with them. At the end of the meeting, the ministers asked us to report back to them regularly on our activities, progress and how we were aligning our efforts towards addressing national and regional policy issues. That gave us the momentum we needed to begin participating in national and regional policymaking – something we have continued to do to this day.

We had the advantage of timing in one regard: African Heads of State had recently launched the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP), a major initiative to transform the agricultural sector and catalyse improvements in farmers' livelihoods and food and nutrition security. CAADP signalled that policymakers, after many

years of neglecting agriculture – and especially neglecting the smallholder farming sector where the majority of sub-Saharan Africa's population is employed – were beginning to recognise its importance as a driver of inclusive development.

The CAADP document, adopted by African leaders in Maputo in 2003, identified four main pillars of inclusive development: 1) land and water management, 2) market access, 3) food supply and hunger, and 4) agricultural research and technology dissemination. Clearly, universities, in addition to the wider NARS, would have a major role to play in achieving Pillar 4. There was no actual mechanism identified within the CAADP framework, however, for engaging with universities.

I had observed from the meetings of the RUFORUM vice-chancellors that our understanding and engagement with policymakers was weak across the board. Yet we were all beginning to recognise that our network could provide a powerful platform for policy engagement. Imagine if we could share and institutionalise – with others across the continent who shared our dreams of building vibrant, prosperous rural communities – all that we had learned over so many years of connecting students and the research system with communities like the P'KWI farmers. We needed to explicitly link our work to the CAADP process.

An opportunity to do so came in 2005, when the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) held its general assembly in Entebbe. FARA is an apex body for agricultural research in Africa, mandated by the African Union Commission to coordinate the policy and research agendas among the different sub-regional and national agricultural research organisations in Africa under CAADP and NEPAD. Our relationship with FARA, initiated during this meeting, set the stage for what turned out to be another formative undertaking for our organisation.

Attending the FARA general assembly was probably one of our first deliberate efforts as an organisation to conduct advocacy

and lobby for our universities to be recognised as having a role to play in the CAADP process. I believe it was Howard Elliot who told us about this meeting and suggested that we participate as RUFORUM. It was a very auspicious invitation for us, and we went full blast into that meeting. Our students stepped forward as our most powerful weapon. Time is always limited in these events, and our time had come to present ourselves as an organisation. But another group, one of the CGIARs – ICRISAT I think – was still working and occupying the room beyond their allotted time. We had a very stubborn student, Prossy Isubikalu, who simply mobilised all the other students to begin setting up their posters and presentations in the room even while the other meeting was taking place. It didn't take much longer for that CGIAR meeting to wrap up; and before too long, RUFORUM held the floor. I was given a platform to talk about RUFORUM and how we could contribute towards building human capital and developing skills to support the implementation of CAADP, as was clearly called for in the document.

One way we envisioned that our universities could clearly contribute to the CAADP process was through the creation of regional postgraduate training programmes in strategic areas linked to the CAADP priorities. Our approach was to have universities pool their strengths; for no single university was strong enough to offer postgraduate training on its own. Yet the universities that did have comparative strengths could contribute their knowledge towards the entire region through the mechanism of the regional postgraduate training programmes. As FORUM, we had focused only on masters training, because that was where the need was greatest. But when we did our strategic planning, we realised that virtually none of our universities were producing PhD holders; yet without new PhD holders joining the university ranks, we would not be able to provide quality training at the masters level either.

We decided to establish regional PhD programmes in strategic areas. One anecdote illustrates what a revolutionary undertaking

this was at the time. A man who had previously been with IDRC came to visit me, doing an assessment. When I mentioned to him that RUFORUM was starting PhD training, he told me, 'Africa is not ready for PhD training!' I was so hurt. But for once I did not react violently. I was learning. I invited him to walk downstairs with me. And then I opened the door of his vehicle and said, 'Please go!'

Nowadays, the idea of African universities producing PhD holders is not too remarkable. This is a sign of how far we have come in the past 15 years. You have to start somewhere – and you cannot expect that capacity will develop overnight. For decades, Africa had been sending its scientists for training abroad. As a network, we felt it was critical for us to develop our own, internal capacity to train our scientists closer to home. And now, 15 years later, this is something we have succeeded in doing. Already we have trained close to 600 PhDs. Yes, the capacity gaps are still big, but we now have quality PhD programmes across the continent.

I later met this same man at a meeting in Abuja, Nigeria, hosted by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, where I had gone to introduce RUFORUM. During my presentation, I told him, 'Sir, you visited my office, and you advised us not to start PhD programmes. I regret to inform you that we have started PhD programmes!'

Like any change process, however, it was hard. Universities across our network were burdened by similar challenges of scarcity: their budgets were tiny, their classrooms overcrowded, and their academic staff overstretched. And then came RUFORUM with newfangled ideas of how PhD- and masters-level training ought to be done. We had secured limited funding for the regional postgraduate programmes, after which responsibility would devolve to the host universities. This setup reflected our determination as the Secretariat to play the role of catalyst for the kinds of changes we were seeking, not merely to act as a fundraising arm.

Initially, our universities had clamoured for the opportunity to host these programmes, understandably seeing an opportunity to draw resources to their cash-strapped institutions. Inevitably, some university leaders thought more of their own interests than of the emerging network-oriented ethos our programmes were meant to embody. Few of our university leaders, I believe, really understood what it meant to take ownership of these programmes. And so, when our limited funding ran out, programmes sank or swam accordingly. A few of the promising projects, such as the aquaculture programme at LUANAR (the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources) and the plant-breeding programmes at Makerere, found champions to push them forward, and continue to thrive today as regional Centres of Excellence.

By the end of 2007, however, all was not well in our network. Our funds had dwindled to almost nothing, and we were on our knees. Around this time, I was invited with some students to attend a CGIAR meeting in Maputo, where Melissa Ho, a programme officer of the BMGF, would be present. The meeting was memorable not least because a plane carrying about 50 of us scientists from Kenya to the meeting had a minor crash on the runway in Lilongwe when the landing gear failed. Fortunately, nobody was injured, although many people at that meeting were visibly and understandably shaken.

For me, the meeting was memorable for a more positive reason: our students really outdid themselves, presenting posters and making oral presentations that I thought were every bit as professional as those of the CGIAR scientists. A senior Rockefeller Foundation official (Garry Tonnesen) was there and introduced me to Melissa Ho. I believe she must have been impressed with our students too, because she accepted my invitation to attend our biennial meeting, which was to be held a few months later in Malawi.

Melissa Ho was to be our chief dignitary at the biennial meeting, and all our efforts were geared towards impressing her. But before that was to happen, we had to deal with a number of mishaps!

I was travelling to Malawi from the Secretariat in Kampala with Patrick Okori, and we both had our pockets stuffed with US Dollars, because there had been no other way at the time of bringing in the money to pay for the meeting. Our flight was on Air Zimbabwe, and we connected through Dar es Salaam. As we landed on the tarmac in Lilongwe, suddenly our plane was surrounded by soldiers! Coming from Uganda, beset by all our recent insurgencies, we found this alarming. We were ticketed passengers on a scheduled Air Zimbabwe flight, and had been checked in and issued our boarding passes without any incident. We were escorted into a room where the soldiers kept us under heavy guard for more than an hour. We didn't understand what was happening. Finally, somebody came and told us we could go. It was only then that we understood that the Air Zimbabwe plane had not been authorised to land or let passengers disembark in Malawi!

Arriving on the campus at Bunda some hours later, with a great sense of relief we handed over our huge wads of cash to the university's finance officers and set about preparing for the meeting, which was to be held at a resort on Lake Malawi (Mangochi), about a three-hour drive away.

In the end it was a very successful meeting, although its beginnings were far from auspicious. We found that our hosts from the University of Malawi were completely drunk! And then the conference bags we had ordered and paid for had been detained by Customs at the border crossing with Mozambique. Sylvia Chindime and Chimwemwe Chamdimba, then graduate students at Bunda College, volunteered to go and fetch those bags. It must have been a four-hour drive to the border where they were being held. The students set off immediately, and returned before dawn with the conference bags.

I still needed somebody to help me moderate the conference proceedings. With the Malawi organising team completely 'confused', I press-ganged Chimwemwe Chamdimba into the role.

I noticed her calm and confident demeanour, and believed she could do it.

Fortunately, Melissa Ho was not yet present to witness these scenes. She was being driven from Lilongwe to Mangochi.

As our guests and delegates arrived in Lilongwe, staff from Bunda College had cooked food for them, and set up a receiving station on the road outside the airport, so that people could eat something before they set off on the four-hour journey to the conference at Mangochi. To me this was a very humbling gesture: living proof of the warm heart of Africa to provide people with the food they needed to make the long journey to the conference.

And then we pulled out all the stops for Melissa. The principal of Bunda College, Prof. George Kanyama-Phiri, personally drove her around in his own Pajero. And during the drive to Mangochi and in the meeting, I had positioned two die-hard RUFORUM supporters, one on either side of her, to hammer home the key points: Prof. Kay Muir-Leresche, the chairperson of our technical committee, and Dr Mary Shawa, a former Permanent Secretary in the Government of Malawi. Once again, however, our students were our greatest asset, creating a beautiful exhibition that showcased RUFORUM. Melissa was able to meet the students and hear them speak about their work with passion and confidence.

The meeting commenced, and Chimwemwe stepped forward as master of ceremonies. A soft-spoken masters student, she had never before done anything like this. I told her, 'You can do it', and she introduced the conference, the speakers and the events and kept the programme moving with admirable poise and aplomb. I had volunteered her for something she wasn't prepared for, and she had managed it very well. Once again, our students had done us proud!

By the end of that meeting, RUFORUM had found a new friend in Melissa Ho, and we were subsequently given the opportunity to develop a proposal for funding. I think that as far as BMGF was

concerned, we were a small organisation with good ideas that were worth scaling. And that is just what the grant provided.

I tasked Patrick Okori and a young woman who was an M&E specialist, with developing the proposal, and the Foundation very kindly provided as backup a technical team: Joyce Moock, former vice-president at the Rockefeller Foundation, and her colleague Liz Levey, who was an expert in ICT. They did an excellent job with the proposal, and in 2009 we were given a US$12.74 million grant to expand RUFORUM activities. With this new lifeblood, we were finally able to move many of our plans, including the regional postgraduate training programmes, from paper to reality.

The Gates Foundation grant was given to us for the purpose of scaling up our activities. We had deliverables stipulated but we also had a lot of flexibility so that we could meet our needs of hiring staff and building our own internal capacity in the Secretariat; establish nurturing grants for the smaller universities; and enrol our first students in the regional postgraduate programmes. These programmes were to be a key mechanism through which we pioneered new approaches to postgraduate training and attempted to institutionalise them. Exciting times lay ahead.

The design and development of our regional training programmes had been quite a process. We had identified key strategic areas to focus on, aligned to the CAADP priorities. Plant breeding, to generate new germplasm to support improved crop production and harness biotechnology, was one key area. Food science and nutrition was another, as by then our societies were already beginning to feel the effects of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, related to changes in people's diets. We identified the management of dryland resources, linked to climate change issues, as another key strategic area. We also envisioned a regional PhD programme in soil and water resource management, to address the issue of declining soil fertility and the need to harness water resources for agriculture. The other identified priority area was agricultural and

rural economics, to build a pool of economic and policy analysts for the region.

We had commissioned a scoping study, led by retired Prof. Malcolm Blackie, a former dean at the University of Zimbabwe who had also served at the helm of FORUM, and Dr Paul Woomer, a US scientist working then with a CGIAR Centre (ICRAF). Through this study, we were able to get a clearer, bird's-eye view, and a neutral assessment, of the different capacities and priorities existing within our network: the priority needs and capabilities of each country; the strengths and capacities of each university; and the regional and institutional gaps.

Looking at issues of environmental degradation and climate change in the expanding dryland areas, we found that the University of Nairobi had a comparative advantage and could serve as the best host for our PhD programme in dryland resource management.

Small-scale aquaculture and fisheries was another key area we had identified for our regional training programmes, responding to issues of collapsing fisheries and growing demand for affordable protein sources among our populations. We found that Bunda College of Agriculture in Malawi (now the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources – LUANAR) had the best facilities, and was well positioned to build capacity for the region. Our idea was that students from across the network would attend these regional training programmes and then return to their own countries and universities to set up related programmes, or at least serve as nodes of expertise for their country in that particular area.

This was an effective strategy. Not all of the programmes were as successful as they could have been. But there were clear impacts across the network. In fisheries and aquaculture, for example, students who trained at LUANAR returned to establish programmes at Moi University (in its School of Agriculture, which later became the University of Eldoret) and Makerere, which probably now has the most competitive aquaculture and fisheries research activities

in sub-Saharan Africa. Our Ethiopian universities have also established fisheries programmes, as has Sudan. At LUANAR, meanwhile, the fisheries programme has a continent-wide profile as the regional node under NEPAD, and is one of the African Higher Education Centres of Excellence.

Makerere, meanwhile, was found to have a comparative advantage in plant breeding and biotechnology. We had a number of staff, some of whom had already been sent to Sweden, including Patrick Okori, Yona Baguma and Settumba Mukasa. We knew they were coming back and could help us develop our programmes. Richard Edema was also studying at Ohio State University, my alma mater, doing plant pathology. And we had Mildred Ochwoh, who had done her masters under my supervision and was similarly pursuing PhD study. We knew this crop of students would give us a very solid foundation to develop a Centre of Excellence in plant breeding and biotechnology, from which to build capacity across the region.

On top of this, there was Dr Moses Kwapata at LUANAR, an early participant in the Rockefeller Foundation FORUM programme, who had basic knowledge of tissue culture. And we had Prof. Patrick Rubaihayo, from Makerere, who had spent a year's sabbatical at Ohio State University to learn the new science of biotechnology. He had previously trained as a plant breeder at Iowa State University. Knowing that the new field of biotechnology would likely have a significant role to play in crop improvement, we had in earlier years, at Prof. Rubaihayo's urging, convinced the Rockefeller Foundation of the value of bringing Prof. Toshio Murashige, an outstanding researcher who had created the media that is used globally in tissue culture, to Makerere.

Drawing on the combined strengths of all these people and their knowledge, we established a PhD plant-breeding and biotechnology programme at Makerere and a masters programme in plant breeding, biotechnology and seed systems. The masters programme would

provide both a pipeline for the PhD programme and masters-level graduates for immediate deployment in the research and emerging seed sectors.

As with other regional programmes, it was designed to involve staff not only from Makerere but also from other network universities in the region and globally. We intentionally forged a partnership with the CGIARs working on crop improvement in the region, and very strong partnership with the Uganda National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO). Although the seed industry was in its infancy in Uganda, students were attached to the seed industry or to projects at Kawanda and Masindi.

Our students were recruited from across Africa and were stationed at Kabanyolo, where I had passed some of my own happiest student days and met my wife so many years back. As I recall vividly, our facilities were makeshift, and in the early years we used tents as our classrooms!

Our efforts paid off handsomely, resulting in vibrant, quality programmes that have been recognised as among the best on the continent. The ripple effects of our work spread across the continent, as our PhD graduates returned to their home countries to start plant-breeding programmes, and the masters graduates went on to join national plant-breeding programmes in the NARS, or joined the Rockefeller Foundation-funded PhD programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, as well as other PhD training programmes globally. Today the Makerere-based programme is a World Bank Centre of Excellence for training in plant breeding and biotechnology.

We also decided to establish a PhD programme in agricultural and rural innovations, which was to be hosted and run collaboratively by three universities: Makerere in Uganda, Egerton in Kenya, and Sokoine in Tanzania. The seeds of this programme had been planted years earlier, when, as a lecturer at Makerere, I had visited the Wageningen University of Agriculture and Research Centre

(WUR) in the Netherlands, and had been particularly impressed by a strong interdisciplinary social science PhD programme they had in rural innovations. One of the students I had met at the time, from Mali I believe, had been focusing in that innovations programme on plant breeding. Now we managed to persuade the Rockefeller Foundation to fund a number of African students – including Prossy Isubikalu, Paul Kibwika, several Kenyan students and students from other countries – to train in our rural innovations programme. To me, this group of students would provide a cadre of academic staff to set up a similar programme in Africa.

Indeed, the RUFORUM regional PhD programme in agriculture and rural innovations built on the WUR PhD programme. We were interested in building a cohort of development practitioners, able to work in a multi-stakeholder setup and to design, facilitate and champion development processes. Staff moved across the three universities to teach and supervise students, and annually the students and staff convened in one country for two weeks of field case studies. We linked with WUR, Montpellier SupAgro in France and the University of Copenhagen in Denmark: their students and staff participated in the two-week field training programme.

Through this and other initiatives connected with our other regional PhD programmes, we began to build strong partnerships with European universities in joint research and training. These partnerships helped us to access bilateral funding from European countries, including Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the UK, and also from the European Commission (EU).

It was during the design of the regional programmes that I met Didier Pillot from Montpellier SupAgro, who later became the president of AGRINATURA (the European Network of Agricultural universities and research institutions). He has remained a strong mentor and supporter of RUFORUM to this day. He attended

one planning meeting, around 2005/06, with a woman from the Czech Republic. After these meetings, we would continue together informally into the evenings, and the drinks and conversations would flow. One drink in particular whipped up excitement among our guests: the Uganda *waragi* – the same local gin my mother had brewed to help send me to school! This Czech visitor could down a full litre bottle of *waragi* and still remain strong, while my African brothers would be staggering. She would ask, 'What is wrong with these African men? I thought Africans were meant to be strong people!' I would look at Didier and he would just smile at me. That was at Rider Hotel in Seeta, Mukono.

We needed to establish our PhD training programmes in particular strategic areas; but we needed a pipeline of students to feed into these programmes. That was a lesson we learned. Thus, we established masters programmes that aligned to these specific niche areas, and saw them as pipeline programmes to feed into our PhD programmes.

At Makerere, for example, we had established the masters in plant breeding and seed systems, and we had also created a node in southern Africa at the University of Zambia (UNZA), so that while the UNZA would be developing capacity for the southern Africa region, it would also be producing students who could later train in the PhD plant-breeding programme at Makerere, or go elsewhere.

We also initially established three other regional masters programmes, one in agrometeorology and natural risk management at Haramaya University in Ethiopia, and another in agriculture information and communication management (AICM), which also ran at Haramaya University as well as at Egerton University in Kenya. In addition, we introduced a masters programme in research methods at Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology in Kenya. These programmes were selected to respond to emerging issues and capacity gaps. The natural risk management programme, for example, was in response to increasing concerns

about climate change and variability. The AICM programmes aimed at strengthening documentation of agricultural research outputs, focusing on packaging, archiving and sharing information; and the research methods programme responded to the serious shortage of research scientists in universities and NARS to guide research.

As with the PhD programmes, we recruited students from across the entire African continent, not just from our members in eastern and southern Africa, and made efforts to bring in experts from across the continent to teach in these programmes. This paved the way for student and staff mobility to become a key feature of RUFORUM – an enduring focus on facilitating staff and student exchanges across African universities – in the interests of nurturing a new generation of scholars and leaders that know our continent better, hopefully believe in and love our continent, and are able to promote regional integration and pan-Africanism.

Once our regional PhD and masters programmes were established, we needed to build these centres up and position them to serve as regional capacity-strengthening nodes. We started strategically twinning them with other institutions where the demand for developing capacity in that particular niche area was great. For example, we linked Bayero University in Kano State, Nigeria with the University of Nairobi dryland resource management PhD programme. Nairobi started building capacity, and now Bayero University is a Higher Education Centre of Excellence in West Africa in dryland studies.

Some of these scaling efforts worked very well, but it was always a challenge to devolve ownership of these programmes from the RUFORUM Secretariat to the universities. While the Secretariat secured limited funding to run these programmes over short time periods, the aim was always for the host university to take ownership of the programme. But for that, we needed buy-in from the local system: we needed governments to actually invest

in these programmes. That has been the weakness of the regional training programmes.

Designing these new regional PhD programmes was another process. Most of our universities were coming from a British education model, where the PhD is almost purely research based. We pushed the universities to look beyond their traditional scope of only building technical expertise, and to include cross-cutting skills training in their programmes. We recognised that students would be working with a diversity of actors, in a diversity of different contexts, and would need diverse skills to succeed in this. To me this was fundamental. But we encountered a lot of resistance. In many faculties, just as I had once not understood why I needed a short course in leadership, others did not see the relevance of exposing our postgraduate students to leadership, facilitation and administrative skills. But we argued that our students would very likely one day find themselves having to serve as leaders, managers and administrators, dealing with issues beyond their technical fields.

To one of the American plant breeders working on our programme at Makerere, all of this appeared irrelevant: he was focused on technical skills. I kept telling him, 'You produce varieties – are you the one who's going to produce and market your seeds? How will you disseminate your seeds if you don't know how to interact with different people in the system? How are you going to get money for your training if you can't get buy-in from other stakeholders?' Indeed, when academics encounter problems in the field, often these problems have little to do with their technical expertise: there are process issues, and other problems that arise when they need to write reports, or interact with others; those are where the gaps are.

We were also strongly influenced in the design of our programmes by Patrick Okori's experience in Sweden, where a doctoral student has a doctoral committee of four or five experts in different yet relevant disciplines all serving as academic advisors. We tried to incorporate this approach in the Makerere PhD training.

Incorporating a leadership aspect into the programme was clearly a critical issue: it was important for students to be able to recognise that they have the potential to be leaders. Dr Jürgen Hagman had infused that workshop I attended in Bellagio with this idea of personal mastery, conceptualising it as people being empowered to consider both their own weaknesses and potentialities. In your career development you then try to improve on your weaknesses while consolidating your comparative advantages.

I recognised the importance of diverse skills and personal mastery from some of the struggles I was having in my own job at RUFORUM. As a lecturer, I had always refused to do anything that was associated with administration. But my role in RUFORUM meant that I had to deal with issues whether I liked to or not. For instance, Hellen Kongai, the secretary, and Patricia Masanganise, a Zimbabwean whom I had brought on board as a programme assistant, were constantly at each other's throats. They would be fighting over sugar, over who sits in front or behind in the vehicle as a mark of seniority. While at first these squabbles seemed simply an annoying distraction, I soon realised that it is sometimes the most insignificant-seeming things that can either sabotage or boost a system's functioning.

The vice-chancellors took the decision to introduce a more comprehensive and course-based approach to our regional PhDs, and it was through such decisions that I began to see the beauty of RUFORUM's governance structure. Because the vice-chancellors were our board, they became our champions. We found that the vice-chancellors would go the extra mile to implement the decisions they had taken as RUFORUM in their own university senates and governance structures, because they themselves took part in reviewing the changes needed to deliver quality PhD programmes – they themselves had made the decisions.

Today, you find that at Makerere, Nairobi and most of the universities, the course-based training approach is being

mainstreamed. That kind of institutional change has only been possible because the vice-chancellors took ownership of RUFORUM. The vice-chancellors' ownership of RUFORUM has smoothed the way for policy change and increased collaboration among universities in many ways over the years.

CHAPTER 12

LEARNING AND UNLEARNING

With our regional postgraduate programmes well under way, we began to grow into the network we have become today. We were broadening our perspective. The journey of the network began to mirror my own personal journey.

In my early years, I had fished and grazed cattle in our local swamp, with little idea that this life-sustaining waterway connected me to millions of other people also living, unseen to me, along the great River Nile.

My academic journey had broadened my horizons and shifted my mindset. I was no longer in my own little patch of the swamp, focusing solely on narrow scientific objectives; I was now viewing these activities as part of wider relationships and contexts. I was seeing change as a systemic process and sought to inculcate this broader mindset – oriented towards building the capacities of young scientists to engage with societal challenges through action research – in our network.

Looking back, I think RUFORUM has been shaped through such processes of gaining new perspectives. As relationships and collaborations developed among our member universities, and different convenings gathered diverse people together in various parts of the continent to share their stories, a very vibrant network emerged. Students were travelling across borders to attend our

regional postgraduate training programmes. Vice-chancellors were beginning to broaden their thinking about the roles of their own institutions in society, and to engage in continent-wide policy processes. To this day, when I ask our stakeholders what it is they value most about RUFORUM, most answer that it is our role in fostering networking and collaborations.

Within FARA, a new programme that would give us the opportunity to demonstrate our worth was under construction. FARA had recently conducted an extensive assessment of the NARS in 26 different African countries, and the results were sobering. The NARS in many of the smaller and post-conflict countries, in particular, were performing badly, with poorly trained staff overwhelmed by the enormity of their tasks, among a host of other problems. The Strengthening Capacity for Agricultural Research and Development (SCARDA) programme was being designed as an effort to build the capacities of these institutions.

Meeting Dr Ralph Kauffman and Dr Irene Annor-Frempong in Entebbe, who were leading the SCARDA process, opened the way for RUFORUM to be involved. Rwanda, Burundi and Sudan had been chosen as the three focal countries in the East African sub-region. SCARDA had made provision for staff members from the focal institutions of all three countries to complete their masters degrees at universities in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, in a variety of subjects that would contribute towards building the knowledge bases in those focal institutions. FARA had obtained funding for SCARDA from the UK's Department for International Development (DfiD), and the programme was funded to run from 2007 to 2011.

Even though CAADP recognised the issue of human capital development, it was not well appreciated within the sub-regional organisations. I do recall that we had a real struggle with ASARECA (the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa). In fact, when we met with that organisation, it

was not the executive director, but the finance manager, who could see and appreciate the value of human capital development, of masters and PhD training. Slowly they bought into it, and because we were part of ASARECA we were asked to manage the human capital development for the ASARECA region. Our task was to design a process to build capacity (both degree and institutional leadership) for the NARS in Burundi, Rwanda and Sudan.

This was how we linked with Dr Tim Chancellor at Greenwich University in the UK, because there had to be a UK partner. He also had a very strong affinity for the issue of human capital development. From the outset there was chemistry between us.

It was a challenging task. Some members of our technical committee thought that our involvement in SCARDA was distracting us from our core focus on capacity building within RUFORUM's 12 member universities (universities in Burundi, Rwanda and Sudan were not part of RUFORUM then). Our board had decided that RUFORUM needed to avoid expanding too fast, and some saw SCARDA as taking us beyond our mandate. But I kept pushing. Somehow, I saw a natural affinity between SCARDA and our organisation, with its design and values around mutual support. Burundi was a needy country, and we were pioneering a model to help build capacity in just such under-resourced settings!

But it was also around this time that my constant hard work began to take its toll physically. Visiting Burundi for the first time in 2006 gave me the first inkling of my diabetes. I did not accept my illness at that time but my legs swelled up, making the journey incredibly uncomfortable. Once I do something I give it 100%: I'm not a half-half person. I think this is partly why I'm sick; I spend a lot of time sitting and working and not watching out for my health. Now my body was sending me clear signals that I needed to be more careful. But I have always found it difficult to slow down – when there is always so much work to do.

Indeed, SCARDA dovetailed with getting the new regional programmes up and running. The SCARDA students from Rwanda, Burundi and Sudan had come along at just the right time to populate some of these pioneering new regional programmes. With expertise so thinly spread in these countries, the potential for real transformation of post-conflict agricultural systems through the hands of small new cadres of well-trained scientists was huge.

In Sudan, however, we faced a nightmare situation. Through the SCARDA programme, FARA and ASARECA had wanted to build capacity for South Sudan, and rightly so. But South Sudan was then still part of Sudan, and Sudan refused to allow such a regional approach within its borders. The message from the government was clear: if you want to do something in South Sudan, it has to be Sudan you are dealing with, not South Sudan.

So I went on a mission with Patrick Okori and Tim Chancellor – I had come to think of it as 'Mission Impossible' – to convince the Sudanese government of the merits of participating in SCARDA. In Khartoum, we were very fortunate to find a friend within the Agricultural Research Corporation (ARC), Prof. Ibrahim El-Dukheri, who later became the Director-General of the ARC, and went on to become the Minister of Agriculture. He now heads the Arab-African Organisation for Agricultural Development. Prof. El-Dukheri accompanied us to meetings across Khartoum, where we sat with government officials and slowly worked out the modalities of how SCARDA was going to be implemented. It was agreed that the programme would have a component of training scientists from both South Sudan and other parts of Sudan, all coordinated at ARC in Sudan. But those meetings also opened our eyes to what could be gained from engaging with the whole of Sudan.

The country and its agricultural research system had become very isolated under the international sanctions Sudan faced. I was shocked by how elderly many of the senior scientists were at the ARC, and how static and hierarchical the prevailing institutional

culture seemed. We quickly grasped that we needed to develop a training scheme to help build leadership and technical capacity among the younger generation. That trip really helped me to gain an appreciation of the different contexts of our different countries and institutions. I was also struck by a very beautiful side of Sudanese culture. Because they are in a water shortage area, families have pots of water outside their houses on the roadside so that whoever passes and needs water to drink can drink that water. To me this was a beautiful indication of human values.

For northern as well as southern Sudanese students, SCARDA presented a very rare opportunity to travel and forge linkages outside the country. From this newfound mobility, RUFORUM gained some incredibly dynamic young students, including Mayada Mamoun Beshir, who completed her masters training in plant breeding at Makerere, doing groundbreaking research on sorghum, and has now returned to occupy a senior leadership position within the ARC. This is our greatest achievement as a network, and my greatest pride: all of the Mayadas out there who trained through our network and have, to paraphrase Gandhi, become the change we all so dearly want to see in the world.

Our role as service provider under SCARDA proved a major learning curve. Students from the NARS of Burundi, Rwanda and Sudan (both north and south) joined these programmes to do masters training to repopulate the expertise within their institutions in such diverse fields as soil science, plant breeding, animal breeding, and agricultural economics and extension. At the Secretariat, we had mapped the capacity gaps within these NARS. I can remember thinking that the mindsets among the SCARDA students and their home institutions alike about human capacity development seemed very traditional and stagnant. I sought to encourage these students to look beyond seeing themselves as mere functionaries and embrace new thinking about their potential to become ‘change insurgents’ in their societies.

Under SCARDA, students from the NARS of Sudan, Rwanda and Burundi came to study at Sokoine, Makerere, Egerton and Nairobi. One of these scientists was Leonidas Dusenge, a Rwandan social economist from the Institute of Agricultural Science (ISAR). He was at Makerere for his masters in agricultural extension and education. In the Rwandan genocide of 1994, Leonidas had fled across the Congolese border with his wife and two small children, and had spent the next several years surviving in refugee camps, sometimes living off wild fruits in the jungle when insurgents attacked the camp. In 1998, he and his family had returned to Rwanda to rebuild their lives.

He entered Makerere around the same time that I discovered the work of Dr Paul Kibwika, whose recent doctoral dissertation, *Learning to Unlearn*, had explored the social dynamics of change processes, looking at the new paradigm of innovation systems. With Paul's approach, I felt that technology transfer, the conventional role of extension, could be conceptualised differently – not as a linear process of getting farmers to adopt new technologies, but as a wider process of facilitating learning and allowing people's individual perspectives to mesh within a common vision of change, across different value chains of producers, sellers and consumers in the country's reviving agricultural sector.

Rwanda was rebuilding itself. Within its dilapidated agricultural sector there was hardly any infrastructure or human resource capacity. The country had more or less borrowed and transplanted the Uganda National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO) set up, but with no capacity to deliver. But the leadership was very keen to turn things around and looked to ASARECA and RUFORUM for support. They identified a few key areas for strategic intervention, of course based on disciplinary approach.

It took time for me to convince Leonidas of the wisdom of widening his focus and working with Paul's approach. But since graduating in 2010, he has gone on to pioneer the innovation

platform model nationwide in Rwanda. Working across such diverse sectors as livestock, maize and fisheries, Leonidas has applied a unique and comprehensive approach to working with communities and helping them understand how they can best make use of research and knowledge. Understanding these uptake pathways – the reasons why a farmer may or may not feel that a new technology suits their particular context – sheds light on how knowledge can be brought to scale. This remains one of the biggest challenges of research.

Through SCARDA, and working with Tim Chancellor at Greenwich, we were also able to strengthen our capabilities of leadership and institutional analysis. This process planted some of the seeds of institutional transformation in some of our universities, teaching us that where there is the requisite leadership and will, change is possible. In Sudan, for example, the ARC was led by elderly men. Women were present but were sidelined in the organisation. Part of the institutional change process for the ARC was bringing gender dimensions into the research system. One of our earliest students, Mayada Mamoun Beshir, embodies this institutional change; once shy and timid, she conducted ground-breaking work with Patrick Okori on improved sorghum varieties for her masters in plant breeding at Makerere, and now confidently occupies a senior management position in the ARC. Now I think women probably constitute the sizeable proportion of the scientists in Sudan.

Through these different initiatives, I was beginning to see the RUFORUM model and vision work in practice. We were seeing the mechanisms of mutual support emerge, as our universities took on more international students and saw their own campuses enriched. It was beautiful to see people from different cultural backgrounds mixing, learning about one another and gaining confidence through their own expanded worldviews. In particular, I remember two young women from the University of Kordofan in Sudan, who

had been very timid when they first arrived at Sokoine, but who had subsequently linked up with local Muslim families, making their own connections, getting comfortable with speaking English, and adapting to life in another country. These processes were challenging for all of us but they helped us to grow.

During one visit to Sokoine University, I landed in Dar es Salaam at the same time as a French-speaking SCARDA student from Burundi. Once again, I berated myself for having sacrificed the study of French all those years back at Namilyango College! Our time spent travelling together to the university campus would have been a great opportunity to connect, but we had no common language. That barrier to communication on that occasion is something I cannot forget, partly because of the sad circumstances surrounding the event; the professor who had collected us from the airport and dropped us off at our hotel near campus never made it home that night. He had been drinking at the hotel bar and, driving back home later, he crashed his car and died. So the student and I were left stranded together at the hotel and unable to communicate.

Through our engagements under SCARDA, universities from all three of the focal countries could see the value of our network and wanted to join RUFORUM. The students like Mayada who had spread their wings to our institutions became our greatest advocates. In this way, SCARDA set the seed for RUFORUM's expansion. Through SCARDA, we built these institutional relationships, but also developed our own capacities within the Secretariat to facilitate collaborations among our different institutions. The SCARDA processes also brought us closer to FARA and the sub-regional bodies. Through all these engagements, we had built a case to put forward to our African leaders. We wanted them to recognise our contributions as universities, and see our role in human capital development as an integral part of the broader agricultural development agenda under CAADP.

In November 2010, we convened a Ministerial Conference on Higher Education in Agriculture in Africa (CHEA), in Kampala, at which more than 400 delegates gathered, including national ministers of agriculture, education, science, technology and finance, representing countries across our network. We had organised the meeting in a collaboration between FARA, David Nielson of the World Bank, and Judith Francis from the Netherlands. Judith was a dynamic woman from the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) – a body created under the Lomé Convention by the African, Pacific and Caribbean group of states and EU member states to work together. I had first met Judith at the FARA meeting in 2005 and she has proved one of my greatest allies over the years.

Part of Judith's CTA mandate was making information available and conducting advocacy. And here we were, a young institution wanting and needing to engage in advocacy! It was wonderful to suddenly find a partner we could work with. Judith and I had instant chemistry.

The outcome of the CHEA was a reinvigoration of interest in higher education in Africa, and ultimately the development of the African Higher Education Centres of Excellence (ACE) funded by African governments through the World Bank IDA (International Development Association) funding stream.

In CAADP, our leaders had embraced a vision of economic development fuelled by the agricultural sector. Now it was time for them to recognise what the leaders who had propelled economic miracles in Malaysia and other countries had known: without investing in people with the skills to catalyse the desired development, it simply would not happen. Where else besides our universities were those fine minds and skilled hands going to come from? And who was going to pay for it? Pivotal as our funders were to us, we had long since realised that grant funding could not sustain our ambitions over the long run. We needed our country

leaders to step up to the plate and support us. While we have made progress in this regard, we are still fighting for our governments to take ownership of RUFORUM. This is part of the unfinished journey.

In all our efforts to get universities to rethink their development impact and role within their societies, one relationship proved to be pivotal. In May 2013, I travelled with 12 other vice-chancellors from across the network to EARTH University in Costa Rica. Our mission was to explore new models for extension delivery, connected to our own Community Action Research Projects (CARPs), our new collaborative research format. The CARPs were basically an expansion of the competitive grants that had been our mainstay under FORUM. They were designed to engage universities in specific value chains and were intended to produce more substantial engagements with communities than the smaller competitive grants had allowed, in order to have a deeper and more enduring impact.

Three CARPs were under way, all of them building on pockets of strength within the network: one CARP was engaging with farmers in Bukedea, Uganda, building on our legacy of work with Norah Ebukalin and the P'KWI group; the second built on work by the University of Eldoret to disseminate new technologies among farmers' groups in western Kenya; and the third harnessed pre-existing expertise in fisheries within Bunda College of Agriculture in Malawi (now LUANAR) towards developing a value chain for small-scale aquaculture with local farmer groups, in response to the collapse of wild fish stocks in Lake Malawi, which was depriving the country's growing population of an important protein source.

We were looking to EARTH University, with its long track record of socially engaged learning, for fresh insights. Visiting this institution more than a decade earlier, I had missed what it was really about. Then, my colleagues and I had only seen the

mundane workings of an agricultural college, and we had not been impressed.

Returning now to EARTH University with a different perspective, I saw a different institution. I saw a university providing its students with the tools to become change insurgents. In the classroom, they were holding robust dialogues and challenging their lecturers. Outside the classroom, they were digging in the fields, running their own businesses, and developing collaborative pilot experiments with local community groups. Through these diverse and self-directed activities, the students, I could now see, were being empowered to explore and develop their own personalities, find their own strengths and build their own confidence and inner drives. This was a real developmental university, and I could see that manifesting through the students.

Only two of the vice-chancellors visiting EARTH University with me shared my view. For most of the others, the model was too practical, too expensive, or simply not feasible for our resource-strapped institutions burdened with their run-down facilities and spiralling numbers of students. So many years previously, I had thought similarly.

My new perspective on what a university should be and how it should engage had meanwhile also brought me into conflict with members of the RUFORUM technical committee. I had championed a proposal from Dr Paul Kibwika to develop school gardens with primary schoolchildren in the Soroti and Kamuli districts of eastern Uganda to address hunger in classrooms but also to instil farming skills and encourage students to think positively about agriculture. My colleagues thought the project was too basic, that a university should concern itself with weightier matters. Irene Annor-Frempong of FARA was the project's only other supporter, and only after she had lobbied hard, linking the project to the NEPAD objective of skilling young people in agriculture, did the technical committee reluctantly approve the proposal.

It grew into a vibrant programme. Visiting one field day, I loved seeing the primary children telling their parents about all of the different technologies they were working with to grow rice, cassava, beans and groundnuts. Moved by the children's passion and energy, and wanting to motivate them further, I opened my mouth and offered to bring them to Makerere. That is how I found myself having more than 150 children sleeping in my home! We showed them around on the campus and the vice-chancellor addressed them. We set up a tent at the RUFORUM Secretariat with food and entertainment for them. The kids were so happy and danced around. I remember Richard Edema, my former student and now a lecturer at Makerere, saying, 'Prof, you have lost it! Is this what you want to turn RUFORUM into?'

I didn't think I had lost it. On the contrary, while the programme may not have met some of my colleagues' ideas of what university research should be, for me it engaged with a fundamental question: how do you make change happen in a society?

At EARTH University, students were learning at the same time as they worked to improve the well-being of farmers. These two objectives were integrated in the curriculum and seen as synergistic. This approach also linked students to the broader efforts of extension to move research findings off the shelf and into communities.

The lessons I took from Dr Kibwika's approach as well as from EARTH University pushed my own thinking in new directions. Could we also design a programme in which student learning was married to co-producing knowledge and technologies with communities to support their well-being? In other words, could universities demonstrate and embody their relevance to society, and contributions to development, through a new model of engaged learning?

Of course, I was not the only one having these thoughts. The two vice-chancellors who had been inspired by EARTH University continued thinking about how they could adapt aspects of that

model within their own institutions. The vice-chancellor of Egerton University in Kenya, Prof. James Tuitoek, noted that his institution had started out as an agricultural training college, and he was inspired to reintroduce dimensions of practical, socially engaged work into the curriculum.

Prof. Nyeko Pen-Mogi, the vice-chancellor of Gulu University, was the other champion. The university had been established in 2002 for peace- and community-building in the aftermath of a 20-year conflict between the Lord's Resistance Army and the Ugandan military that had ravaged northern Uganda. At this university, where instead of growing and testing crop varieties on university farms, students already worked shoulder to shoulder with farmers in their fields, the model was a natural fit. It has since been taken up in other faculties at that university.

Both universities' adaptations of the EARTH University model is what ultimately attracted funding from the Mastercard Foundation for the RUFORUM TAGDev programme, addressing youth skills development in agri-entrepreneurship through hands-on training.

When Prof. Pen-Mogi retired as a vice-chancellor, he went on to start a community development programme, with skills training for rural youth, putting into practice what he was championing at the university. And Prof. Tuitoek (Egerton's former vice-chancellor) is still pushing for the scaleability and impact of the model; the Community Engagement Programme pioneered by Egerton University is now being implemented by universities in about 20 countries.

From glowing sparks and embers, the fire grows. It is beautiful to see the flames being fanned by those who understand the value of producing graduates within whom the capacities for science and development, research and societal impact, are joined.

The fire has caught and spread – though not with everybody, of course.

We are starting to see the barriers break down, however, between science and development. How do you keep the balance between research that is development-oriented and research that is more abstract but may eventually contribute to solving a problem? It all comes down to the same thing. Whether in the lab or in the throes of community organising, each one of us is working to change something for the better. Ultimately, all these efforts will have a development impact. Getting people to see that connection can be challenging but nevertheless it is there. These have been some of my learnings and unlearnings.

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CHAPTER 13

CONNECTING A CONTINENT

Within the first few years of RUFORUM's operation, the network clearly showed the potential to galvanise the universities working together. Our network was growing, bringing new countries, cultures, contexts, geographies and languages into the fold, and we scrambled to manage that growth. I was surprised early on to receive overtures from the University of the Free State in South Africa. We received a visit from a delegation that included an academic named Prof. Frans Swanepoel. The university wanted to join RUFORUM and was proposing that we send students from our network to train at their university.

The intention was very positive but they had missed the point, I felt. RUFORUM was not just about sending students from one country or one university to another. It was about universities working together – not in a one-way process but rather linked as member universities in a network of inter-relationships. Having listened to the South African delegation, I politely told them that no, it was not the right time for them to join RUFORUM.

But my friend Frans Swanepoel was a solid pan-Africanist, I believe. A white person, he embodied I think that part of South Africa as a country that was seeking to heal the breach with the rest of our continent, after having isolated itself before the arrival

of democracy in 1994, more than a decade earlier at that point. Frans did not forget about us. Several years later, he moved to Stellenbosch University, and from there he approached us again. He acknowledged that they had understood our concern and still wished to join this network of African universities. The approach was totally different, we took his request to the RUFORUM board, and in 2013 Stellenbosch University joined our network.

These early overtures and engagements with South Africa and West Africa at the inception of our network foreshadowed things to come. By 2013, we had mushroomed from our initial tight cluster of 10 universities into a network of 32 member universities, encompassing Namibia, Lesotho, Ethiopia and Sudan. Our diversity as a network was growing exponentially.

As a scientist and a citizen, this was tremendously exciting to me. I have always believed that diversity is what gives humanity strength. Perhaps this has to do with my Kumam identity: as a tiny group within Uganda's great sea of more than 50 ethnicities, we have never had any claim to power or prestige on any basis other than individual merit and our ability to get on with others. As such, I have always felt pained by the small divides that create so much hatred among our people, and saw the expansion of our network as a great opportunity to unite in the common cause of food and nutrition security for our continent. I have very strong views that you should not be judged on your colour, your ethnicity, your tribe, your gender, or your religious belief, and have felt the pain of being denied opportunity because of where you come from.

After all, our blood is the same. In my darkest hours of need, the people who have been with me were not from my tribe. It was the dean of my faculty, from western Uganda, Mateete Bekunda, who lent me money to take my wife to South Africa when she was ill. Patrick Okori, whose tribe and mine do not see eye to eye, was the one who went immediately to my home in Olyanai after my wife's

death, and is still remembered in the village as the professor who was cleaning toilets and serving food to the children, taking care of everyone in preparation for the funeral. And it was Prof. John Mugerwa, a Muganda, who pushed me onto an aeroplane to the US, saving me from my own hot-headedness in the aftermath of Obote's overthrow.

So, when it came to embracing our diverse multitudes within the network, I was thrilled. As scientists, we recognise diversity as a key element of life. Genetic improvement in crop and livestock production is based in diversity.

As a manager and a fundraiser, however, I could see this was going to be a nightmare.

Our membership was expanding, but our resource base had not. On this, I have one recollection that to this day causes me chagrin. Khalid Bomba, the programme officer at the BMGF who managed our grant after Melissa Ho left the Foundation, came to me with an offer. On the sidelines of one of our strategic meetings held in Bellagio, Italy, in 2010, he told me, 'RUFORUM is a beautiful organisation'. The Foundation was concentrating its work in six anchor countries, three of which were located in West Africa; and Khalid was offering us BMGF resources to expand our network into West Africa.

Several of the RUFORUM board members were at the meeting, and I took the proposal to them. They decided to refuse Khalid's offer. Their concern was that we would be spreading ourselves too thin. And they were right. We had not yet built the capacity within our organisation to manage a network that spanned the entire continent.

So, on that occasion we declined support offered by the BMGF to expand into West Africa. But by 2014, only a few years later, it had become a political question, and we expanded anyway, despite lacking the resources to support such a move. Without money, we opened up our network to its first entrants from West Africa.

In the lead-up to that milestone, we were also making progress on the policy front. Through our engagements with Stellenbosch University in South Africa, I was invited towards the end of 2013 to a meeting in Pretoria. That was to be my introduction to Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, who was then the Chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC).

My hosts seated me next to Dr Dlamini-Zuma at dinner, and I regaled her with the RUFORUM story. Included in our group was the current Cabinet Secretary in Kenya, who was also then the vice-chancellor of the University of Nairobi, Prof. George Magoha. I waxed long into the evening, until I felt Prof. Magoha tapping me under the table, telling me to be quiet.

But the Chairperson accepted my invitation to attend our next biannual meeting, to be held in Maputo in July 2014. And she came ready to engage. She addressed our meeting, met with students and young researchers, visited our exhibitions, and had a round-table meeting with all the vice-chancellors and other dignitaries, including the humanitarian leader Graça Machel, Akinwumi Adesina, who was then Nigeria's Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and now leads the African Development Bank, and national government ministers from Mozambique and Uganda.

Interacting with our students – always the ace up our sleeve – Dr Dlamini-Zuma I think developed the view that our small organisation could be nurtured and built up to become a platform for fostering engagement of African universities in policy. At the round-table meeting, our vice-chancellors had raised the issue of the need for close engagement with the AUC and other policy organs. They had specifically requested Dr Dlamini-Zuma to work towards convening a meeting between vice-chancellors and the African Heads of State. I was humbled by her interest and her willingness to engage in this.

Dr Dlamini-Zuma had promised to take our proposals to the African Union, and she was as good as her word. Working with

Senegalese President Mackey Sall, she convened a summit on higher education in Africa, held in Dakar in March 2015. This led subsequently to a special summit of the African Union in Sandton, Johannesburg, where leaders agreed to establish a Committee of Ten Heads of State and Government ('C10') to engage with universities and champion education, science and technology.

Thus Maputo marked a turning point for our organisation. At that meeting, our board took the landmark decision to open membership to West African institutions, setting the stage for us to become a continent-wide body. Those West African universities that had previously wanted to join our network (as far back as 2004) were invited to apply. The University of Port Harcourt, set in the seat of oil and gas production in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, was looking to build capacity in agriculture in efforts towards diversifying the local economy. The University of Cape Coast in Ghana was also invited into the fold. Both universities were admitted to RUFORUM. Subsequently, Bayero University in Kano, Nigeria, also applied for membership. Located as the university was in the harsh drylands of northern Nigeria, its driving interest in our network stemmed from our regional focus on dryland research.

Unfortunately, however, the board's decision to expand to West Africa created a rift with some of our oldest supporters and friends. Joyce Moock and Howard Elliot disagreed vehemently with the decision, and did not mince their words in telling me so. They felt that our expansion would dilute our impact on the ground; and indeed I am facing these implications today as the expansion continues. My answer to them was that while our board members may not have grasped the implications of their decision, they took a decision nonetheless, and I was to implement it.

Soon after our first Nigerian and Ghanaian universities were admitted, we began to face the pressures of expansion, as new member institutions from Cameroon, Egypt, Sierra Leone, Liberia,

Senegal and Mali followed suit. We were now a fully fledged pan-African body, and we were poised to operate at the highest levels of pan-African policy.

For all the anxiety that raised, it also opened the door to beautiful new collaborations, including with the University of Abomey-Calavi in Benin. The vice-chancellor at the time, Prof. Brice Sinsin, whom I consider another pan-Africanist, wanted to join our network, and invited me to Benin. Visiting the campus, I was impressed by this small, well-organised university within a small, well-organised country. While the infrastructure did not seem particularly outstanding, everything seemed well thought out. On the walls of the laboratories hung lists of the university's academic journal publications that year. We had enough confidence in Abomey-Calavi to begin sending our students to train there.

As we were negotiating the university's admission into RUFORUM, I was struck and humbled by the mark of a man with extraordinary vision. RUFORUM had been engaging with the Mastercard Foundation for the previous few years, and we were formulating a new proposal to develop a scholarship programme linked to the Foundation's platform of employment and job creation for youth in agriculture. It frequently happens that our network and our member universities seek funding from the same sources, and Abomey-Calavi was no exception: it turned out that Prof. Sinsin was also engaging with the Mastercard Foundation. To my surprise, however, he turned down the prospect of a US$10 million grant to his institution in order to join our platform and be part of our broader Mastercard proposal.

I consider Prof. Sinsin a rare visionary. Even knowing that the RUFORUM grant would bring him fewer resources, he envisioned that linking the university and students with other institutions across Africa would expand the university's horizons beyond Francophone Africa, and create greater value through the strength of those engagements. I further realised the breadth of the vice-

chancellor's vision when he later complained to us that the first batch of students we had sent him were all French-speaking. 'When I send my students out,' he told us, 'I want to send them to different linguistic communities!'

The other highlight of my trip to the University of Abomey-Calavi was meeting Dr Achille Assogbadjo and his wife, Dr Flora Chandare, a husband-and-wife team conducting groundbreaking research on our iconic African baobab trees. Their collaboration – as an agronomist and a nutritionist, respectively – was just the sort of multidisciplinary research envisaged under our CARP programmes. They were cultivating baobabs as a crop in order to relieve pressure on endangered wild tree populations, while also developing food and value-added products from the tree's nutritious leaves to address local malnutrition. We first supported this research with a small grant and it has since blossomed into one of our flagship CARP+ projects.

In the end, it was the efforts of both Gulu University and Egerton University to implement the EARTH University model that secured us funding from the Mastercard Foundation. The Foundation was not drawn to supporting our broad regional approach – but as a longtime supporter of EARTH University, they agreed to support the pilots at Gulu and Egerton. The result is the programme Transforming African Agricultural Universities to meaningfully contribute to Africa's growth and development (TAGDev), which has developed into one of our flagship programmes.

Meanwhile, all was not well at home. When I returned home to celebrate Christmas with my family in the village, it was clear that my father was nearing the end of his days. The year before, we had gathered the clan and brought all his grandchildren together to celebrate his life. Now, he said he wanted to join his wife, my mother, who had died back in 1985. I will always remember my father as someone who accepted death.

As my father's health deteriorated, I thought back to the man

who was known throughout our area as a great dancer. I remembered how, whenever there was a function at my maternal grandfather's home, he would sit near the fire and then get up and dance. The young people would come and watch him dancing alone: he was the man, the in-law, the big bull. They respected him because he was the husband of my mother, who was the oldest child from that home.

First his eyesight faded. I took him to the hospital, where they wanted to operate to remove his cataracts. But he told me, 'My son, my time has come. Don't waste your money; save it for yourself and your children. There is a time when you must move into the next world.'

Shortly afterwards, I travelled to Khartoum, and there I received the phone call that my father was dying. I travelled immediately back to Olyanai. My father gave me several days with him just holding my hands and lying on the laps of my sisters. All of my sisters and many relatives were there. One morning I had greeted him and then walked a short distance away to buy food. They came and told me, 'He has left us.' That was on 29 January 2018 – 29 January also being my birthday.

I will always be grateful that my father Edimu gave me a chance to say goodbye. He was a difficult man. I think I got my stubbornness and blunt manners from him; I've always found it difficult to hide my feelings. He was firm in his convictions: when he took a decision, that was it. And if he didn't like you, he would tell you to leave his home, saying, 'There's no vacancy here!' But he was never selfish. We had cows, so in line with our culture he picked out two boys from families that did not have cows, brought them up in our family, married for them and gave them land. I remain grateful that he never sold off any of our land. Our home is the only place where you can still see a semblance of the natural forest, because my father kept our land and our home well.

I hope I will find the same courage to face my next journey with confidence.

Perhaps it was my father's spirit rising in me once again later that year, when I attended the first C10 Summit, held in Lilongwe in November 2018. Dealing with policymakers is a very fluid situation. After our friend Dr Dlamini-Zuma left the AUC, there was nobody to drive forward the C10 initiative, until finally the president of Malawi stepped up as our champion and agreed to host a meeting.

Arriving in Malawi, little did I realise I was getting drawn into turf wars. People I thought were my friends avoided me in the hallways. The current AUC chairperson didn't even attend, and I was reminded rightly by other members that the president of Senegal, not Malawi, was the overall leader of the C10. I was even told that I was overstepping my mandate, and should leave the organisation of such events to the AUC.

The vice-chancellor of Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique was to speak at the meeting, representing the Association of African Universities. The AAU had rightly undertaken various consultations with university networks and leaders, and we had made input into a common paper to be presented by the AAU. The Eduardo Mondlane University vice-chancellor came to the meeting ready to deliver the statement. But when the time came for him to address the delegates, the AUC representatives sent someone else up to the podium, leaving the poor man standing there. This AUC man droned on and on, until the president of Malawi, concerned about time, stood up and told him to keep his points short. What an embarrassment! I still feel embarrassed at the way AUC conducted itself. In fact, it was so shocking that I could not refrain from speaking my mind in a letter that I addressed to the AUC. I was sad that the highest level of the African Union could stoop so low. I expressed my views, which has now made me unpopular with the AUC, but I think I would have been untrue to myself had I not.

My subsequent dealings with policymakers have been infinitely

more pleasant and productive, signalling that although we are not explicitly a policy-driven organisation, our convening power has grown. In April 2019, I travelled to Liberia with 10 of our vice-chancellors to meet with President George Weah. The board had decided to ramp up our advocacy to the level of Heads of State, recognising that if national leaders subscribed to RUFORUM's vision, they would become our greatest champions both within their own borders and through regional and pan-African dialogues with their fellow Heads of State.

These are admittedly uncharted waters for us. Today one leader may be your friend while tomorrow he is out of power and you have gained nothing in building a relationship with him. And it is expensive. Inevitably, I had to question the wisdom of flying 10 vice-chancellors to Liberia. Should I rather have spent that money on training a student? Nevertheless, here we were.

Two years earlier, when Liberia joined RUFORUM, we had received a rare invitation from the former President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. We went to Liberia, and President Sirleaf made us a humble request: help us rebuild the human capital for my country. Our connection remained, and with the change in leadership we had returned seeking buy-in to convene our next meeting of Heads of State on building Africa's science, technology and innovation capacity.

We were a diverse group of university leaders from Benin, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Senegal, South Sudan, Uganda and Zambia. We were met at the airport by the University of Liberia's President, Prof. Ophelia Inez Weeks, who was very hospitable and went to great lengths to engage us with stakeholders across the higher education sector. Our colleagues at the University of Liberia had organised a higher education day, consulting with the Ministries of Education, Finance and Agriculture and also bringing in the private sector for a robust discussion on the state of higher education and development in the country, the changes they

wanted to see and how they envisioned benefiting from regional collaboration. Each of our vice-chancellors wanted to tell a good story – something working well in their country, and how they could help Liberia. Our universities agreed to contribute in one way or another to building capacity in Liberia. That would not have come about without that spontaneous meeting.

Meeting President Weah later on was a special highlight. The president conducted himself with humility, and engaged fully in our discussions. 'As a footballer,' he said, 'I made money, I'm a millionaire. But I needed an education, because I knew somebody would ask me, "What are your credentials?" Education has helped me and prepared me to be a leader.' He encouraged us to continue advocating for key issues and to keep trying until we reached the right people. He gave the example that when he was a football star, he lobbied the former President of FIFA that the next World Cup should be hosted in Africa. It took several years of concerted effort but eventually FIFA agreed and the 2010 World Cup was held in South Africa. Our meeting lasted two-and-a-half hours, and then we were treated to a state dinner in the president's home. It was an occasion to remember.

Around the same time, the East African parliament had asked us to identify a keynote speaker to address them on issues of food, nutrition, universities and research, and my colleague Dr Anthony Egeru had recommended Patrick Okori, now with ICRISAT in Malawi.

I attended Patrick's address at the parliament in Arusha, Tanzania, which filled me with pride and gave me the opportunity to reflect on how far we have all come as a network and as individuals. The speech highlighted three main issues: i) policy leaders need to know that their national policies are essential to the success of the agricultural development agenda of their countries; ii) countries must honour the commitments they have already made to support agriculture under the Maputo Declaration; and iii) countries must

harness the opportunities and put in place mechanisms to re-engage youth in agriculture in order to achieve the future Africa that we all want, expressed in the AU's Agenda 2063.

As we listened to Patrick, I could see the pride that I felt reflected in the eyes of Ugandan parliamentarians. This was one of our own, a quality person, and his performance was exceptional. As he spoke, I was learning and seeing the connections. As Patrick later told me, giving that talk was an opportunity for him to reflect on RUFORUM's growth. He told me he was struck by how our organisation had matured to become a thought leader for the African continent, opening the way for our universities to have a voice and to invest in our young people, helping to set an agenda for where the continent should be going.

Looking back at RUFORUM's trajectory over the past 15 years, I sometimes feel disappointed that we haven't achieved more. Our success lies in the people we have trained, and the knowledge-building collaborations we have facilitated among them. Yet, as we struggle, the problems of poverty, climate change and hunger continue to accelerate unabated. Our youth are hungry for employment and opportunity, and we are failing to provide societies in which they can reach their potential and thrive.

The slow work of capacity building is generational work. Looking back, we have mobilised many partnerships, and brought people and institutions from across the continent to work together. We started this journey without much knowledge, and only now is all our advocacy beginning to pay off – for example, with our C10 created and meeting to champion the cause of education, science and technology. Looking back to our inception in 2004, we did not envisage at that time that we would have expanded to a continent-wide network of 120 universities across Africa – and growing.

What gives me more pride than anything is the role we have played in creating a new generation who are taking responsibility

for driving change on the continent. I look back with pleasure to think that we may have contributed some small seeds of change through the confident and skilled people who have reached their potential through our network.

I think of these people as our 'Islands of Success'. There is Patrick Okori addressing the East African parliament. Visiting Sudan, I see Mayada Mamoun Beshir, now a deputy-director general in biotechnology at the ARC, taking charge and doing things differently. At the University of Eldoret in Kenya there is Dr Abigail Otinga, who has galvanised farmer groups in western Kenya through our CARP project. In Uganda, there is Robert Kawuki, whose masters research led to the release of two soybean varieties now being grown across Africa, supporting the oil and livestock industry across the continent. Everywhere I go, I meet with skilful and proactive graduates and researchers who are Islands of Success within our network. And they are having a positive impact at grassroots level. How can I forgot Norah Ebukalin, for instance, whom I met several years ago with 12 other women, starved and basically naked – but now transformed and creating positive ripples of impact not only in their communities but across the continent.

You want to see the people you train do better than you – every journey is an unfinished journey. But as I now complete the last leg of my own unfinished journey, I feel at peace knowing that I leave behind people who are going to continue the journey to develop a better world than the one we live in today.

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EPILOGUE

As I grow tired, I find, like my dear late wife Nagujja, a strong urge to return to Olyanai, my village, where this journey began. I look back in time, to the beginning of my own life, to my childhood of fishing in the swamp, to herding and fighting as we grazed our cows down by the swamp as boys. I remember all those mango trees I used to climb, for solace and revenge. I think of how climbing those mango trees, seeking the sweet fruit as a kid, taught me to always look towards the future, searching for that next mango ripe for the plucking, revealed amid the leafy branches.

I close my eyes and can see my grandfather Ibrahim Eyadu and my father Boniface Edimu sitting on the verandah of our grass-thatched hut, shaking their heads and jiggling their legs up and down. I can see my mother Polina Atim and my grandmother/auntie Ada Adongo packing my suitcase and walking me to the bus stop to go to school. I remember my grandmother Rebecca Ayoko telling me, 'I know one day you will come back and make our home a better place.'

I close my eyes again, and look back even further in time. I imagine the countless past generations of my ancestors who fanned out from the highlands of Abyssinia, traversing mountains and plains and swamps, branching off from the larger tribe to arrive at what is now Serere, and later settling in Olyanai. I think of how my lineage connects me with so many other tribes across Africa: the Masai, the Karamojong, the Langi.

I think of the thread that was placed around my neck after my birth, along with the threads around the necks of my mother and grandmothers. I think of how these threads were released into the swamp, to symbolise our shared and continuous journey of life. Thinking of all the people who have shared different stages of the journey with me, it has been just as my grandmothers said it would be: some of us did not make it, some of us got stuck in the reeds, while others have travelled very far.

It saddens and troubles me today that Olyanai seems stuck in the reeds. The world is changing and evolving so fast, and my people are being left behind. The natural environment has been depleted: most of the fish are gone, the forests are gone. Even the verdant mango trees, and the gracious shea nut trees, so important in our culture, are being chopped down for charcoal production. Our rich natural heritage has been stripped away as our growing population pursues daily survival. Our rich, traditional culture no longer sustains us; but nor are we reaping the benefits of modernity.

In the primary and secondary schools that my family and I have built and supported, we have tried to introduce some of the learnings taken from EARTH University and other institutions that encourage the teachers to allow the children to develop their minds with passion and curiosity. We have encountered resistance everywhere to new ideas and practices in the classrooms. Trying to change society is a difficult thing indeed. Meanwhile, the population is growing rapidly; the schools I attended as a child are now bursting at the seams with 1,000 children or more. Teachers struggle to teach in classrooms packed with 200 children or more, and the learners go hungry during the day, as no one provides them with *posho* and beans.

But all is not lost. Travelling around my home district recently, one of my colleagues, Sylvanus Mensah, a programme officer in the RUFORUM Secretariat, was deeply moved by the challenges facing our society. He and other colleagues in the Secretariat mobilised support for all the young people in my district who had met the

requirements for university entrance, arranging admission for some 35 students from across Kaberamaido district to Gulu, Ndejje and Busitema Universities. I believe this group will represent the largest cohort from my district ever to have reached university. Each of these young people will take their own journey, and plant their own seeds of transformation. I imagine that in 10 or 15 years' time, my district may be a different place because of what some of these students will accomplish. That gives me hope.

When I was the same age as these incoming students, who could have imagined that my own journey would take me so far? I think of how many people there have been who shared my journey and helped me along the way: the women of my village who would press *chapatis* and coins into my hand as I waited at the bus stop; my brilliant teachers, Mr Pius Epau who had us singing our mathematics and English lessons; Prof. Alphonse Emechebe who inspired me with his passion for mycology; Prof. John Mugerwa who pushed me reluctantly onto a plane to do my PhD in the United States. I think of my friend Mark Erbaugh from Ohio State University, who was always encouraging us to expand our horizons and interact with diverse sets of people. And my friend John Hakiza, who took me to the graveyard in Wooster, Ohio, and reminded me that every life journey is an unfinished journey. I think of my colleagues Prof. George Kanyama-Phiri from Malawi, Prof. Brice Sinsin from Benin, Prof. Adil Deifalla and Prof. Ibrahim El-Dukheri from Sudan, Prof. Kay Muir-Leresche from Zimbabwe and Prof. Frans Swanepoel from South Africa, and so many others who have shared and inspired a common pan-African dream of building prosperity on this beautiful continent.

I am lucky indeed to have been part of starting the RUFORUM network, working with a group of people so passionate about our beautiful continent, and travelling far and wide seeing so much of Africa's beauty and diversity. In mid-2019, I finally landed in Mali, a country I had always wanted to visit, and was struck anew by the

people, the place, the music. I could see our beautiful grasslands of Olyanai there, and thought back to the dances I attended as a youth, punctuated with our local drumming and music.

It has been a great privilege to work towards human capacity building on our continent. We have begun to see our universities collaborating, rethinking their approaches to education and gearing training towards meeting our developmental challenges. I begin to see the universities change from being ivory towers to being developmentally oriented. I travelled recently to Bishop Stuart University in Mbarara, Uganda, one of our newest RUFORUM members, and was heartened to see a development-oriented university in action, producing a new breed of students who were being trained as quality entrepreneurs and young leaders. Our network is currently 15 years old, and I wish we had more of these success stories to tell.

Over the course of my career, I have worked hard to bring up younger generations of scientists and leaders to become catalysts for change on our continent. It is up to all of us to nurture the young people to grow up and surpass us, to help this continent reach its potential and thrive. We still have such a long way to go. But, slowly, our approach is working. I look around me, and I see Patrick Okori, tall and brilliant, eloquently outlining an agenda for moving us forward. I see Mayada Mahmoun-Beshir asserting her leadership and driving institutional change in Sudan. I see Norah Ebukalin leading development forums across the continent. I look at my own beautiful children, Milton Edimu, Raymond Ekwamu, Polina Atim, Theopista Nagujja Adipala and Mika Euchu Eyadu, and feel pride and pleasure. Any one of us can only do so much on our life's journey. Then it is time to pass the baton on to others. Today I feel satisfied and fulfilled to see this next generation of scientists and change insurgents that have been built up through the RUFORUM network and are now in their prime: strong, capable and proud. Some day they, too, will have to pass the baton on to others to continue the work of this great unfinished journey.