

Busting The Myths About Africa

Be careful what you believe about Africa. The communities we work with are dispelling many of the misconceptions people have about the continent.

“African communities do nothing to help themselves”

The myth: The portrayal of African people as helpless and dependent on Western help is one that has been built by decades of well-meaning but arguably dangerous charity advertising.

The truth: The debate around how development charities should advertise is a complex one, but photos of sad, dirty children with eyes that call you to urgently donate money often ignore the fact that African people can and do help themselves.

Take the farmers we work with for example. Low yields, poor quality produce and economic exploitation are some of the main reasons why farmers in rural Kenya and Uganda earn so little. As a result they can even struggle to feed their families or send their children to school.

But these farmers don't want or need hand-outs. Instead we help them get more income from their produce by providing the information and training they need to improve their farming practices. Farmers like David Gichuru:

“I have been growing potatoes and cabbages for more than ten years now. There have been good seasons and bad seasons where you harvest very little. At times, when there are crop diseases, pests and harsh weather conditions farmers suffer high losses. Most farmers are also unable to get good market for their produce since they are unable to bulk their produce or store it properly.

But when Build Africa organised a field day the farmers from my district had an opportunity to meet agricultural officers, who shared various information on how to improve our farming.

We had an opportunity to learn how to prepare our land for growing crops, how to handle the harvest and market it and later sell it at a good price. The activity, which was the first in this village, brought together farmers and local leaders who shared the best ways of doing profitable farming.

The field day helped me understand how to grow my vegetables from the seed bed and how to transfer them to the land. I also learned how to control diseases and pests.

It was also good to learn about the best seeds for growing in our area and opportunities for value addition and post-harvest management, which is usually a challenge, especially when there is a bumper harvest.

As farmers we agreed to form a network and start a demonstration farm where we would grow a variety of seeds and use it to learn and educate other farmers in the region.



David Gichuru (in white trousers) showing his cabbage plot to other farmers

The network will also be useful when selling our product as we shall completely do away with the middlemen who try to get us to sell our produce at lower costs at the farm gate.

I am certain that with the new information, I will be able to get better profit from my crops. I expect to even harvest more crops and fetch a handsome price when I take them to the market”.

An agricultural officer holding a training session





Joseph Mutunga, head teacher at Kwandoo Primary School

“In order to develop, Africa should become like the West”

The myth: it is only by following the lead of Western economies that impoverished African countries can lift themselves out of poverty.

The truth: In many cases this may be true, but in others the West could learn a thing or two from Africa. Take sustainable energy use for example.

According to the International Atomic Energy Agency both the UK and the United States source only 11% of their energy from renewable sources, less than the 13% of total power production that Kenya sources from geothermal activities alone (that is, the thermal energy generated and stored in the Earth). And geothermal power is cost effective, reliable and environmentally friendly. In addition, a staggering 50% of Kenya’s energy comes from hydroelectricity.

Joseph Mutunga, the head teacher at Build Africa-supported Kwandoo Primary School, told us about another renewable energy source that’s perfect for rural Africa:

“Recently we had four solar panels installed on the roofs of two of our classrooms. The panels light eight bulbs and two desk reading lamps, helping us hold early morning preps for pupils who

arrive in the dark. So the light is free, renewable and easy to manage.

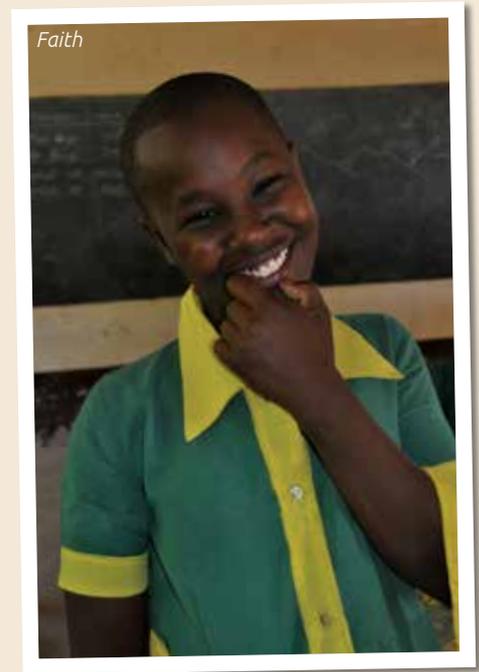
The panels have a charger which stores the energy and switches to light the bulbs. The lamps last a long time and help the school save on the cost of electricity bills and paraffin for the lamps. The panels also come with solar charged desktop lights that can be used for desk reading and marking. And they have phone charging capabilities, which reduces the cost of phone charging”.

14-year-old Faith is a pupil at Kwandoo Primary School:

“One of the things that make me like my school is the new solar lighting. Our teachers come to school early to give extra lessons to children who are falling behind. Pupils can cover the syllabus early, revise for exams and ask the teachers more questions. This will help us pass our exams and go on to good secondary schools.

I am happy to know that by using the solar panel we are conserving the environment, which is important for the animals and people in the future.

In science we are also taught that solar energy is completely natural; it is considered a clean energy source.



It does not disrupt the environment or create a threat to eco-systems the way oil and some other energy sources might. It does not cause greenhouse gases, air or water pollution”.

In terms of long-term sustainability, shouldn’t we be looking to Kenya for some answers?

“Africa is poor, and always will be”

The myth: Yes, 47% of people in Sub-Saharan Africa live on less than £1 a day, and this is a scandal, but...

The truth: ...this number is falling, and things are getting better. On a national level many of Africa's economies continue to grow.

This is not surprising when you look at the Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) groups that we work with. The Kyeni Kya Kithaathai Group in Kenya is typical.

The majority of the members are women who have been left widows and sole breadwinners. They struggled to make ends meet until Build Africa's VSLA scheme helped them invest in seedlings and tools, organic fertilizer, diesel for the generator, a greenhouse and a drip-feed tank to irrigate their onions and cabbages.

Esther Kasuva, the group chairwoman told us:

“Last year we planted tomatoes and were able to realise a sale of 25,000 Kenyan Shillings (approximately £180), which covered the farming costs and bought all the farm inputs we needed. The balance was shared among the members and added as savings in the group.

Build Africa has been a great friend to the group. They have assisted the group members to get training on poultry keeping, good agricultural practices and greenhouse maintenance. The training has helped the members to diversify individually and also improved our greenhouse farming.”

The members can now manage their homes and support their children's education. And this is just the beginning. Esther says that they also want to “scale up the farming, so that we can get more money to grow the savings pool and improve members' livelihoods”. It is a fantastic story that we hear again and again in our livelihoods programme.



Members holding onions from their farm

Did you know that six of the ten fastest growing economies in the world are African?



Group members in their greenhouse



Esther Kasuva



Esther using the water tank for irrigation



“There is no access to modern technology in rural Africa”

The myth: Most Africans, particularly those that live in rural areas, have no access to modern technology.

The truth: Mobile phones are an example of modern technology being used in very innovative and exciting ways to help end extreme poverty across Africa. Mobile technology in Africa is actually an incredibly fast growing market.

The case of Joyce Wambai, one of the village managers at Kakayuni Child Rights Group, is an example of the lie lurking behind the mobile myth. The Build Africa-trained group was formed as a lobby group for child rights and to help the community protect their children’s rights through information sharing.

Joyce says: “My mobile phone is very useful in ensuring that I communicate

with other members. I use it to receive cases of child abuse and updates from my group. Whenever there is an incident we usually circulate text SMS’s to all the members”.



Joyce Wambai with her mobile phone

In addition, Joyce uses her phone to access financial services for the group’s Village Savings and Loans Association activities; relaying messages about meeting arrangements; trading livestock and accessing online information. She says:

“Mobile phones are now very common, with at least one in every homestead in the village. Most people see it as a necessity and will use their savings to buy one.”

The mobile phone has been very helpful, considering our past forms of communication, where we would have to write letters or walk for long distances to get information. This led to a lot of inconvenience and time wasting. Without the mobile money services we would have to go into towns to collect and send money.”

The true picture of African life is far more complex than the adverts would have you believe. We hope these articles have helped shed some positive light on the real story and dispel some of the myths and generalisations that persist.

The Habari interview

My name is Pamela Inenu. I work as a programmes assistant on Build Africa's education projects.

What does your job entail?

My job involves ensuring pupils stay in primary education and encouraging them to go on to secondary school. The girls often need encouragement to carry on in education after primary school. This also involves me supporting and improving the livelihood of parents so they can be supportive of their children's education. I will usually meet with the teachers and parents to help them see how best this can happen. The more pupils I see carry on to secondary school the happier I am! I also help ensure that there is an improvement in literacy and numeracy skills amongst pupils. This is done through school tutorials, school debates, quizzes and essay competitions.

Why Build Africa and what makes it different?

Build Africa really is changing the lives of rural people across Uganda by improving their education and livelihoods.

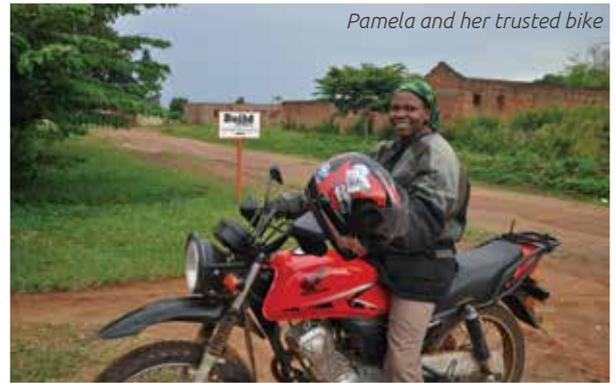
Pamela Inenu



For me, Build Africa stands out because of its personal and respectful approach; it shares its knowledge with the communities in order to aid them in their own development.

What challenges do you face?

Working with communities of course has its challenges. Bad weather sometimes affects my work and my motor bike doesn't always like the roads. Also, development is a process and changing people's attitudes and perceptions is not



Pamela and her trusted bike

always easy and will take time. In the communities it is the men who are usually the dominant figures and on occasion have not taken me seriously.

What do the communities think of you?

I hope they see how committed, hardworking and dedicated I am to my role. I spend most of my days in the field and the community members are amazed by the fact that I ride a motor bike everywhere. Some ladies have even asked for me to teach them a trick or two about riding. It also makes me happy when the girls in the school say that they wish to work for Build Africa Uganda and work as a programmes assistant like me!



Pamela with school girls at Moru Kakise Primary School

One small number that makes a big difference in your Will

If you have already left, or are kindly thinking about leaving, a gift to us in your Will it's really important to include the right details for 'Build Africa' along with our Registered Charity Number: 298316.

Will Writer Rachael Rodgers explains the importance of including this number in legacy clauses:

"Should a charity change its name, or perhaps merge with another, its original charity registration number will always follow it. This enables your Executors many years

later to trace it, and ensure they receive the intended legacy; otherwise, sadly, many legacies will fail for lack of clarity.

Likewise, it is best to leave the legacy for a charity's 'general charitable purposes', rather than for a specific project or purpose, which may have ceased before the legacy is received."

If you would like to find out more about the recommended legacy clauses to include in your Will, please visit our website www.build-africa.org/leave-a-gift or call Abi Betts on 01892 519619.



How you are helping us provide a world of opportunity



You are helping us see less of this because you are helping our communities...



Save and borrow on a regular basis through savings and loans groups



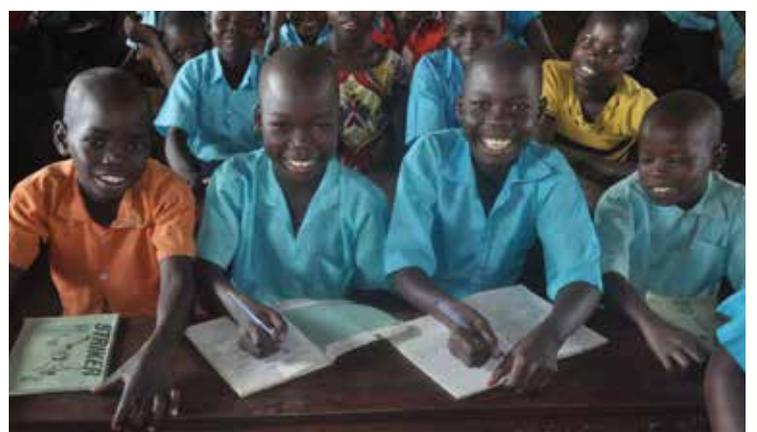
Bring business ideas to life and make farming profitable



Feed the whole family, pay school fees and buy uniforms



Support the improvements at their school, from teacher training to a clean water supply



...all of which means they can send their children to school and ensure that the school gives them a great education.

Thank you!

Build Africa

Second Floor, Vale House, Clarence Road, Tunbridge Wells TN1 1HE.

Tel: +44 (0)1892 519619

Email: supportercare@build-africa.org.uk

www.build-africa.org

Build Africa is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England No. 2200793 • Registered Charity No. 298316

Build Africa Inc. (USA)

501 (c) (3) organisation (4601439696) c/o Chapel and York LTD
1000 N West Street, Suite 1200, Wilmington, DE 19801

Email: enquiries@build-africa.org

www.build-africa.com

It's better by email

Have you given us your email address yet? It's a quick and easy way to tell you about developments and thank you for the difference that you are making.

If not, then please contact Emily Brown on supportercare@build-africa.org.uk or call **01892 519619**. Or, if you are giving a donation, you can include your address on the returned form.

