

Imke in Uganda: "No electricity, yet power"

On behalf of Wilde Ganzen, Project Advisor Imke Straaten participates in the [Young Expert Programmes \(YEP\)](#). For one year she lives and works in Uganda and enters dialogue with our partner organisations: How do they involve the community? What do they need as an organisation to mobilise communities? And, how could Wilde Ganzen support them in this? Through this blog series she shares her stories, experiences and findings from Uganda.



The street life in Kampala is characterized by service and entrepreneurship. Everything is for sale on the streets: tomatoes, onions and potatoes, roasted maize, fresh pineapples and dried beans. But also flip flops, furniture, kitchenware and even paintings. The colourful streets of Kampala are enveloped by the smell of freshly baked 'Rolex' [Rolled Eggs] and exhaust fumes.

Because cars are everywhere: On the rare occasions when there are no traffic jams, drivers skilfully avoid the potholes in the road or brake for the dreaded boda bodas (motor taxis).



The street scene in Kampala is like a Jan van Haasteren jigsaw puzzle: It is one big puzzle book and everywhere you look there is something to be seen. I have been living in Kampala since September last year, and every day I am amazed by unfamiliar scenes.

I understand more and more the context in which our partner organisations operate. And I have to admit that it is often more challenging than I initially thought, realising that capital city Kampala is not representative of rural Uganda.



No electricity



With an average of one or two power cuts per week, I have experienced what it is like to live by candlelight. When the power goes out, you realize how much electricity you actually use in daily life. And probably as a Mzungu (white person of European descent) even 'just' a bit more than average. Laptop, telephone and Wi-Fi. But also, the boiler, fridge (with freezer) and lights in the house.

" My Western discomfort increasingly gives way to understanding, acceptance and admiration."

This is not a lament. My Western discomfort is increasingly making way for understanding, acceptance and admiration. Whereas we in the Netherlands can strive for efficiency and results through a tight annual schedule, the partner organisations in Uganda achieve more without planning. Time is relative and patience is a virtue. But this is certainly not at the expense of results. What have I learned from them so far? Expect the unexpected and you can take on the world!

And then there is the political climate.

Yet 'power'

Since its independence in 1962, Uganda's political climate has been influenced by ethnic differences, civil wars and a police force. This translates into deep-rooted bureaucracy, hierarchy and corruption: In a country where the president can change the constitution, there is less and less room for civil society organisations.

It is as if, while playing the game, the rules of the game are being changed. But here too, the question is: How do you deal with these shifting goal posts? How do you navigate such complexity?



Heavy rainfall resulting in power cuts and ever-changing legislation place demand on the creativity, flexibility and adaptability of the partner organisations in Uganda. But they carry on. That too is entrepreneurship. Driven by solidarity and determined to make a meaningful contribution to their communities, people take responsibility where the government fails them.

And with this I learn that *"Without power, they still have got the power"*

