



# Cambridge Chronicle

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2005

## Teacher brings gift of learning to native Uganda

By Sarah Andrews  
Chronicle Staff

These days, when visiting her native village of Arua, Uganda, Rachael Adriko doesn't travel light. Last year, she and her husband, Richard, boarded a plane, each toting a suitcase filled with 250 books. Next trip the loads could be even larger.

"Thank God for transit," said the King School teacher.

It all began as a small goodwill gesture. Adriko, preparing for a trip home last fall, noticed a box of 50 or so books sitting outside the King School. A sign above the box encouraged people to take them home, but week after week, the pile remained.

So Adriko, who teaches in the school's after-school program, approached the administration and asked if she could take the books with her to Africa and distribute them to Arua's children. Everyone agreed, and a small effort began to collect even more books for the trip. Within days, Adriko had 200 books. That soon grew to 1,000.

Though nervous at the prospect of actually getting the books from Cambridge to Arua, a small village on the Congo-Uganda border, Adriko was

### You can help

*If you want to volunteer money, services or advice to the African Mobile Book Library, e-mail Racheal Adriko at [readafrica@yahoo.com](mailto:readafrica@yahoo.com).*

also excited to give her village a rare and precious commodity.

"In Africa there is a saying that it takes a village to raise a child," she said. "But this also instills the value that you always give back... I'm sure people in the village would like money or would like gold, but now they can understand the power of a book. A book takes you away. A book teaches you."

Of the 1,000 books, Adriko gave 400 to kids in her village last year.

The daughter of a Ugandan politician who attended college in Boston, Adriko knows she's been blessed and wanted to do what she could for her native village. Though her family fled Uganda's civil war for Kenya when she was a small child, they returned during her teenage years.

But she also wanted to spread the resources farther. Schools in Uganda are horribly crowded — with one teacher for every 200 children — and



King school teacher Rachael Adriko works with Destiny Smith-Matta at an after-school program. Adriko is collecting books to bring back to her native Ugandan Village, where reading material is a rare commodity.

they lack basic materials, such as books.

So, Adriko spoke to her aunt, who met with the village elder council to discuss how they might go about also distributing the books to five of Arua's neighboring villages. One elder volunteered the use of his bicycle, another the use of his box and a final elder volunteered the use of his time.

Thus, the box was strapped to the bike and filled with books, becoming what is now known as the African Mobile Book Library. Every week or so, the elder rides the bike through the five villages, allowing children to exchange their books for a new one in the box.

Adriko said at first convincing the children to part with their books was tough. In an area ravaged by civil war for years, Adriko said it took a while to explain that they would receive a new book in exchange.

"You have no idea what war does to people," she said. "The children were clinging to the books ... They said, 'How do we know that the bike will come back?'"

Adriko is tentatively scheduled to return to Arua in December, but the trip may be put on hold. Recently, sev-

eral aid workers and one foreign national were killed by a rebel army in northern Uganda. A travel advisory has been issued and Adriko and her husband, who is American, will wait to see if it is lifted.

But regardless of her travel date, Adriko is again facing the dilemma of transporting the donated books overseas. This year, the book drive has garnered 5,000 titles, and Adriko's pretty sure they won't fit in her suitcase.

Because of the popularity of the Mobile Library, Adriko is also hoping to expand its reach, by creating more bicycles capable of transporting books through the villages. But to keep up with the project's momentum, Adriko said she needs help. She's seeking donations of money or even business advice to keep the library afloat.

"I hope the children can see the value in books," she said. "I hope that the books can take them away from their everyday lives."



Rachael Adriko teaches students the value of a good book, both at the King School's after-school program and in her native Uganda.