

'It's radical': the Ugandan city built on solar, shea butter and people power

Level: Advanced

1 Warmer

Choose the best answer for each question.

1. Uganda is a country in **East / West** Africa.
2. The capital of Uganda is **Nairobi / Kampala**.
3. **Kenya / South Africa** is one of Uganda's neighbours.
4. The currency of Uganda is the Ugandan **dollar / shilling**.
5. Shea butter comes from **animals / trees**.
6. Shea butter is used to make **cosmetics / food**.

2 Key words

Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

advocate ambitious breaktime disillusioned endeavour
harness indigenous instalment radical rampant
rarity revenue sustainable thriving unique

1. _____ is a rest between school lessons.
2. A / an _____ change is new and dramatic change.
3. A / an _____ plan is one that is difficult and will require a lot of effort to succeed.
4. A / an _____ business or community is very successful.
5. A / an _____ project is one that uses methods that do not harm the environment.
6. A / an _____ is something that does not happen or is not found very often.
7. If a disease is _____, it exists, occurs or spreads in an uncontrolled way.
8. A / an _____ is one of several payments that an amount is divided into and they are paid regularly over time.
9. If you are _____, you feel disappointed because something is not as good as you thought.

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10. _____ is income from business activities.
11. A / an _____ is an effort to do something, especially something new or difficult.
12. _____ people lived in a place for a very long time before other people arrived.
13. A / an _____ selling point is the thing that makes a product or service different from others.
14. If people _____ a resource, they get of control of it in order to use it for a particular purpose.
15. If you _____ for a particular policy or way of doing things, you publicly support it.

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Ojok Okello is transforming his destroyed village into a green town where social enterprises responsibly harness the shea tree

Caleb Okerere

3 March, 2021

- 1 The village of Okere Mom-Kok was in ruins after more than a decade of war in northern Uganda. Now, just outside Ojok Okello's house, final-year pupils at the early childhood centre are noisily starting their breacktime and a market is clattering into life, as is the local craft brewery, as what has become Okere City begins a new day. "I think what I'm doing here is radical," says Okello, who is behind an ambitious project to transform the destroyed village of 4,000 people into a thriving and sustainable town.
- 2 Okere City began in January 2019. Its 200 hectares (500 acres) feature a school, a health clinic, a village bank and a community hall that also serves as a cinema, a church and a nightclub. Electricity is available to all, generated from solar energy – a rarity in the region – and far from the many outbreaks of cholera, which were rampant years ago, there is now clean water from a borehole.
- 3 Pupils at the school pay half their fees in cash and the rest in maize, beans, sugar and firewood. The clinic lets people pay their bills in instalments. The local security man carries a spear, an unusual sight in an area where many men sit around as women do most of the paid and unpaid work.
- 4 Okello is funding the project from his own pocket. In 2020, it cost 200 million Ugandan shillings (about £39,000). The London School of Economics graduate and development expert had worked for several international charities and NGOs but grew disillusioned seeing projects fail because, he says, communities were not involved in decisions about their own future.
- 5 When he returned a few years ago to Okere Mom-Kok, the village he had left as a baby when his civil servant father was killed in the bush wars of the 1980s, he decided to put what he had learned into action. He wanted to create a project that was truly led by the people who lived there. Okere now generates revenue. Every project, from the school to the local bar, can fund itself, something that has been possible because the project is being built not as a charity but as a social enterprise, Okello says.
- 6 While comparisons could be made to Akon City, the futuristic smart city in Senegal, Okere is, in essence, the opposite, according to Amina Yasin, an expert in city planning, who works in Vancouver, Canada. "Akon City is going to be a walled city for the wealthy," she says. "It sounds like a capitalist endeavour on the African continent. It is to benefit mostly non-indigenous Africans, unfortunately."
- 7 Okere City will pioneer green energy, but its unique selling point is its shea trees. Okello says the inspiration came to him as he sat under a shea tree outside his house one afternoon in early 2020. "I looked at the shea tree and realized that we have this important natural resource and we were not harnessing it," Okello says. "So I thought, 'Damn, I'm going to invest everything within my means to use this resource, to protect it and to use it to help my community.'"
- 8 In August, Okere Shea Butter arrived on the market. The whole city smells of shea butter, and Okello has advocated for the protection and regeneration of shea trees, classed as an endangered species threatened by extinction.
- 9 Once a week, an investment club meets in the community hall. The majority of the more than 100 members are women, mostly farmers, but some also run small businesses. "I got a loan from the club to buy shea seeds, which I sold at a profit," says member Acen Olga.
- 10 Members' financial contributions are carefully recorded before being redistributed as loans to members who need them. When borrowers repay the loan, the cycle continues. This style of banking is particularly important because it's original to Africans, Yasin says. "The way in which Africans have thought about money has always been outside of the central banking system," she says. "It's been about community and caring for each other, and patience, and long-term investments. We've always known a lot earlier than the Western world that money was out of fashion and it was not a sustainable way to live."

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- 11 But rural-to-urban development projects only work if they are created by and include the communities they are working to serve, says Yasin. "Okere City is being intentionally developed with the community in mind," she says, "whereas what we often see in cities across the world that do something similar is individuals who are kind of running away from larger cities and settling in smaller communities that they aren't from."

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3 Comprehension check

Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. Why was the village of Okere Mom-Kok in ruins?
2. What is Ojok Okello's ambitious project?
3. How do people there pay their bills at the clinic?
4. Why is the local security man an unusual sight?
5. Who is funding the project?
6. Why, according to Okello, do projects fail?
7. How does Okere City differ from Akon City?
8. What is Okere City's unique selling point?
9. What is the African style of banking based on?
10. According to Amina Yasin, when do rural-to-urban projects work?

4 Using key language

Match the adjectives in the left-hand column with the nouns or noun phrases in the right-hand column.

- | | |
|---------------|---------------|
| 1. endangered | a. city |
| 2. green | b. resource |
| 3. natural | c. investment |
| 4. smart | d. people |
| 5. small | e. species |
| 6. long-term | f. work |
| 7. indigenous | g. business |
| 8. unpaid | h. energy |

5 Discussion

Discuss these statements.

- "Local is always best."
- "Money makes the world go round."
- "Solar energy is the answer."

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6 In your own words

The article describes some of the radical steps taken to transform a small Ugandan village into a sustainable town and also mentions a futuristic city in Senegal. Look up examples of futuristic or smart towns or cities on the internet and find examples of what makes these towns or cities different from those that exist today. Using the information you have found, prepare a short report on the town or city of 2050 and what it will look like.