



PRINCE LUDWIG OF BAVARIA MY AFRICA VIRUS

I do not talk about some mutant strain of Covid or some other infectious disease when I mention my Africa Virus. It merely describes the phenomenon, how the love for this great continent can catch you from one day to the next, shape your life significantly.

Coming from an aristocratic family in Europe, I had little to complain about in my youth. The pretty bubble of privilege I grew up in left me concerned with 'developed' world problems, such as optimizing my education and finding purpose in a large pool of possible cultural, political, or economic career options.

In my case, I chose to study law, and my academic interest grew towards international humanitarian law. Especially the African continent caught my eye, and even if it were usually the negative examples of armed conflicts or humanitarian catastrophes that made the news - it started to call out to me attract me more and more. Maybe I had subconsciously been influenced by all the overly romanticized "White Saviour" stories that had circled literature and popular culture for the past decades that would call a young person out to experience adventure.

But before seriously considering a career in humanitarian law or human rights like working for the United Nations or similar organizations like many of my friends, I decided to travel the continent independently first - before being bound by a strict set of rules of an international organization.

I remember my first tour, where I started backpacking and hitchhiking through the Rift Valley, trying to reach a remote missionary station between the Kenyan and Ethiopian Border. I had my adventure, of course: I never got to reach my destination but spent weeks living with locals, travelled hundreds of kilometres on the back of lorries, sometimes even with a goat on my knees. What I did discover is that the "White Saviours" were nowhere to be seen. What I saw from the large international organizations main-

ly were billboards. They stand in the middle of nowhere, proudly declaring the territory as the location of agriculture, water, livestock, or similar projects. But, much like the shattered statue of the arrogant King Ozymandias, in Percy Shelley's equally named poem, there was only dust and rubble left.

It made me think a lot about the sustainability of international aid. From being a devoted supporter of the role of the International Community, I became carefully sceptical of what its achievements on this continent were.



Prince Ludwig of Bavaria



Leaning Lions Students and Prince Ludwig of Bavaria at local Hackathon

On a more positive note, I found many locals on the ground who had their ideas on how to solve the regional problems. These ideas were diverse, and some were more realistic than others. But they all had the commonality that they had people behind them, who never would let their own dreams turn to dust. This pioneering mindset to build something from the ground up, may it be a school, a farm, or some business under the most challenging circumstances, is just so much more elemental than in Europe.

Without a convenient hardware store or even a road nearby, people in the villages have to utilize local materials. You learn to appreciate the value of water, electricity, and road construction if none of them are provided by the public infrastructure. Everything has to be created from scratch.

This challenge can be incredibly addictive and is the first element of the Africa Virus that made me return again and again. But the most decisive aspect is the realization of dreams and the difference between before and after. The African continent can offer plenty of examples where development has happened rapidly out of its own strength. Think about the immense discrepancies

between a thriving technological community and a start-up and entrepreneurial mindset of Kenyans in a hub like Nairobi and their fellow nationals living in villages without water, school education, or health facilities only a few 100 kilometres away.



Learning Lions Studenten



Students at Learning Lions Campus

Development that took Europe centuries can be done on the African continent in few decades or even just a few years. It is easy for somebody visiting from the “developed” world to catch this Africa Virus and be enticed to join into this adventure journey of rapid development. But it leaves the question of how international people like me fit in there. Let us forget about “saving” people, and even the word “empowerment” has a condescending taste when it comes from abroad.

The term “cooperation” has a better ring to it sounds better, but it is often reduced to interactions between governments or companies, while it should be between people. In my case, I was lucky to find the right people on the ground who shaped my work for the last ten years.

It began with a foundation connected to my family, named “Hilfsverein Nymphenburg” (after a fancy castle in Bavaria), an excellent vehicle to start supporting local groups in Kenya to realize their dreams. Some of these groups began with

one or two individuals, but they grew into fully formed local organizations through our cooperation.

Like it should be true for any development aid, our approach was always to listen first and find a solution after - constructively together. Especially in an environment where development is still beginning, one should not approach the community with a ready-baked solution or even a single type of intervention.

If you approach a village community and offer to build a school, they will gladly agree. But what about the promise of a better life that should come with a school education? Is it not also our responsibility, that when we sent a child to school for many years, to make sure that there are opportunities for further education and eventually a job?

When looking for solutions, I find it helpful to look at the situation holistically. In my experience, it is much more fruitful to build up a partnership with one community to develop everything, from



Prince Ludwig of Bavaria, opening of Kindergarden

infrastructure to education and business, to put it on a solid and confident path that can again inspire other communities.

There is one particular area called Turkana in the North of Kenya near the Ethiopian and South Sudanese Border where together with some organizations, we started such an experiment. It takes effort.

During the last ten years, I spent twice as much time on the ground in Turkana as in my home Bavaria. It began with a meeting under a tree with the few locals of a village that knew how to read and write and create their own school.

At that time, the villages only consisted of straw build houses with no infrastructure whatsoever, and people relied completely on international food aid. We started by providing them with construction materials for building schoolrooms, and a year later, they had 200 students. Especially one of the teachers was a youth activist, and he convinced me that the young people in the area had incredible potential.

About ten years later, together with the same local people, we have built a thriving village called Loropio. It has kindergarden, a primary, and a secondary school. Many of those who were too old for school found employment in local business opportunities we helped to create, such as a factory exporting fish and other animal products to the cities.

Even though the village is located in a semi-desert, it now has its water system, supporting greenhouse-based agriculture - making it primarily self-sustained. Loropio has a privately operated solar-based electric grid and even waste separation and recycling. Its most considerable pride is the “Startup Lions” ICT Campus with a Digital Training Center and Coworking space. Local youth with the right talent learn to provide digital creative services as freelancers for customers in the entire world. The idea for Startup Lions was sparked by the above-mentioned local teacher, who is now co-founder and director. This particular project was even awarded the “Google Impact Challenge Award” for best African NGO.



Prince Ludwig of Bavaria and Kenyan Cofounder with local Governor

Of course, it took some considerable resources to realize all this, and several organizations were involved in funding the progress of this location. But essential for the success of all these projects were the same people, some I had met initially under that tree. But it was not only them. The success was also based on international exchange directly between people. For the ICT Campus project, we had more than 50 skilled volunteers from 20 to 60 years of age within the last years. They came out of professions from carpenters to web designers to network system administrators. All were more than happy to invest their time as volunteers and transfer their specific skills. If you also happen to catch the same Africa Virus as I did, do not be discouraged by adverse reports or the idea that outsiders should not interfere. There is

a lot to be done in this continent! Find people there you can work with - not by saving them, but by engaging them on equal level, person-to-person, and find out what you can do together!

Photos: Learning Lions

Prince Ludwig was born in 1982 and is the oldest son of Princess Beatrix and Prince Luitpold of Bavaria. He grew up at Kaltenberg Castle together with his four siblings. He studied law at the University of Göttingen, focusing on international public law and human rights. Prince Ludwig assumed a number of representative and honorary roles by request of HRH Duke Franz of Bavaria. Beside other roles he has been a member of the board of the Foundation Hilfsverein Nymphenburg since 2011 and is especially responsible for projects in Africa. In 2014 he founded the charitable organizations "Learning Lions" and "Start up Lions" in Kenya, together with several partners. Both foundations are exclusively funded by donations. Since 2019 he has been organizing the so called "Löwenmarsch" or March of the Lions from Kaltenberg to Neuschwanstein, counting a distance of approximately 100 km. Prince Ludwig participates regularly in this march with other enthusiasts. The returns are donated to the Learning Lions.



Startup Lions ICT Building



Typical meeting under Tree in Turkana



ICT building is opened by architect Francis Kere