

M O V I N G

P I C T U R E S

A UGANDAN PASTOR SHARES CHRIST THROUGH A FILM MINISTRY

BY KAMI L. RICE

With a cloudless sky enclosing the islands of East Africa's Lake Victoria in its azure dome, it's easy to forget, from the vantage of a colorful wooden fishing boat on the lake, that there is a "rest of the world."

Sam Tsapwe, however, never seems to struggle with remembering the rest of the world, whether he's ministering to people on these remote Lake Victoria islands or to people in Sudan, Uganda's northern neighbor, or to people in Uganda's capital city of Kampala, where he lives.

Standing 6 feet tall, Tsapwe is a solid man, both inside and out, and a dedicated servant of God. He is slow to speak and soft-spoken when he does, but he's the kind of person one is willing to wait for and lean in to hear. He's quietly passionate in his care for the people of Uganda's Ssesse Islands and of Southern Sudan, people about whom, he believes, God cares deeply.

A native Ugandan who remembers the challenges of being a Christian during Idi Amin's rule, Tsapwe runs a Kampala branch of the Jesus Film Ministries from a borrowed office at Mission Aviation Fellowship's administrative compound.





Sam Tsapwe preaches to the church congregation on Bukasa Island before showing the film outdoors. Photo: Layton Thompson

He used to work full time for MAF and do Jesus Film work on the side, but about five years ago he sensed God calling him into full-time film ministry work.

Partnering with a wide network of pastors and churches from a variety of denominations, Tsapwe says his primary focuses are outreach to unbelievers and training of pastors/ church leaders. Though he does show films to assorted groups, his work extends beyond the narrow duties the ministry's name might suggest. He also organizes and leads conferences for pastors, heads up medical and other ministry teams providing care in partnership with churches, and participates in youth conferences.

Far from being restricted to the *Jesus* film, Tsapwe's rich film library includes movies covering a variety of Christian themes. When preparing for a showing, he consults the host pastors and leaders to choose the most appropriate film for the audience. Tsapwe shows films only in partnership with local churches, he explains, because showing films in places without churches would leave new Christians without local support. Considering himself a supporter of pastors and carefully avoiding making himself the focus of attention, he's quick to point back to the local church and depends on them for follow-up.

In spite of his reserve, Tsapwe has a gentle charisma that emerges most clearly when he preaches. His face lights up as his passion for sharing the gospel takes over, using the whole of his energetic body to engage the audience in a practical understanding of Scripture. Whether mixing salt

and dirt to illustrate the biblical command for Christians not to lose their saltiness or plugging a single light bulb into his generator at twilight and exhorting believers to "be the light!", Tsapwe seeks to ground believers in biblical truth.

With a deep humility that can sometimes edge into self-doubt, Tsapwe marvels at how God uses him to advance his work. As converts walked forward to receive Jesus following one of Tsapwe's sermons last September, he whispered, "People are coming to Jesus, and I didn't even make an altar call." On a different night, several unforeseeable setbacks had challenged a scheduled film showing in the Southern Sudanese town of Ikotos. Hiding his suspicion that the evening was going to be a failure, Tsapwe introduced the film with enthusiasm. In the end, failure wasn't God's plan; up to 20 people became new Christians that night. Tsapwe said he'd shown films in that town before with higher attendance and fewer faith decisions. Clearly the results are in God's hands.

Regularly encountering spiritual warfare as they minister in communities throughout Uganda and Sudan, Tsapwe and his partners saturate their work in prayer, certain of God's victory. "It's a beautiful thing to witness someone coming to Jesus," says Tsapwe, "moving from one world to another before you." ■

Freelance writer Kami Rice (kamirice.com) spent the fall of 2007 traveling in Africa, writing stories for mission organizations, and meeting amazing people. This year she's spending a month in Haiti and relocating to the UK in order to continue living and writing cross-culturally.



Opposite: Sam Tsapwe Photo: Layton Thompson

Right: Tsapwe dances to African praise music with village children before showing a film. Photo: Layton Thompson