

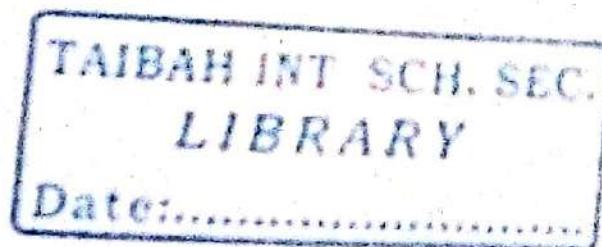
# The Snake Farmers

**Yusuf K. Serunkuma**

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*To their endless quarrel – He should come and eat, she said;  
he should stay and read, he charged!*

# Preface

Hundreds of people have died. Animals have died. Snakes have bitten them all. A snake epidemic has broken out in a remote village in Sahara Republic. This incident has attracted a lot of international media coverage. Locally, the villagers working with their leaders – Chairman Opobo and Mzee Sekadde – have put up a slow but promising fight. They cannot look on as snakes kill their children and animals.

Internationally, the stories and pictures of the epidemic ravaging villages touch private individuals, artistes and religious groups. In Europe and America, church meetings, music concerts and individual campaigns are held to fundraise for Sahara. In addition to cash, equipment is bought for the fight against the snakes. When the people from Europe arrive, with superior anti-snake equipment, the villagers are pleased by this show of generosity. The Europeans take the driving seat, and the villages are quickly enabled to overcome the epidemic.

By the end of the epidemic, however, the elders of the village – such as the Chairman Opobo, Mzee Sekadde, and the man who was in charge of equipment – are better off than before the epidemic struck. Life has generally improved: Those whose children used to walk barefoot can afford shoes; those who had one wife have taken a second; those who used to go penniless for a long while, can now afford money in their pockets. This earns them more confidence and more bragging rights! The village now has a hospital, and several newer houses can be seen.

All these things happened during the time of the epidemic – which attracted good hearts from wealthier countries.

However, the epidemic was conquered, and their European brothers may never come again. So what happens thereafter? How do they keep their new pleasant lifestyles going? How do they invest in a brighter future for themselves, their children and their neighbours? Should they decide to keep their European friends interested in coming again? How should they do it? Chairman Opobo and Mzee Sekadde have to come up with something. A new future is in their hands... Their next steps form the crux of this play.

In 2010, undergraduate students at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, working with Dr Kathryn Barrett-Gaines adapted and performed *The Snake Farmers* as part of their "History of Africa After 1800" class. Then, it was entitled *Snakes in the Sabina*. After screening, the play was scheduled to air on the *Discover UMES Channel*. However, the university censored it because of its "offensive content". University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES) being an all-black university, argued that the play "offended white people" and was not ready to go this way.

I hope watching and reading *The Snake Farmers* from an African location, with an African view of the world should not just be interesting but also an illuminating exercise.

YSK,  
Kampala, 2014

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# Characters

<b>Chairman Opopo:</b>	Local council chairman of Kayunga
<b>Mzee Sekadde:</b>	Local council chief of Kayunga
<b>Samson Daly:</b>	Christian minister, Britain
<b>Oyire:</b>	Bereaved villager
<b>Richard English:</b>	Mayor of London
<b>Matt Brown:</b>	British civil service worker
<b>Emmy Brown:</b>	Matt Brown's wife
<b>Duncan Foster:</b>	<i>British News Network</i> television anchor
<b>Peter Stokes:</b>	Africa correspondent, <i>British News Network</i>
<b>Educated man:</b>	Educated villager
<b>Lutalo:</b>	Villager
<b>Opio:</b>	Villager

*The adaptation includes off-screen punch lines extracted from renowned authors and activists including*

<b>Bono:</b>	British rock star, African aid activist
<b>Colin McEvedy:</b>	British historian
<b>Amadou Hampate Bâ:</b>	Malian writer and ethnologist
<b>Sam Kiley:</b>	British journalist
<b>Curtis Keim:</b>	American professor of African History and Political Science
<b>Binyavanga Wainaina:</b>	Kenyan author and journalist
<b>Jonathan Glennie:</b>	British development aid policy analyst

*Cast list at the premier at the University of Maryland  
Eastern Shore studios (2011)*

<b>Ivy Mathews:</b>	Opobo
<b>Kahmandin Daiga:</b>	Sekadde
<b>Stephanie Terry:</b>	Villager I (Head of snake hunter committee)
<b>Jesus Hernandez:</b>	Samson Daly
<b>Clifford Glover:</b>	Duncan Foster
<b>Astin Blount:</b>	Peter Stokes
<b>Nkenge Mosley:</b>	Bono
<b>Jesus Hernandez:</b>	Colin McEvedy
<b>Astin Blount:</b>	Amadou Hampate Bâ
<b>Nkenge Mosley:</b>	Sam Kiley
<b>Stephanie Terry:</b>	Curtis Keim
<b>Leroy Myers:</b>	Binyavanga Wainaina
<b>Clifford Glover:</b>	Jonathan Glennie
<b>Kathryn Barrett-Gaines:</b>	Yusuf Kajura Serunkuma

# ACT ONE

## Scene 1

*It is about mid-morning, and the sun is up in the sky. In Kayunga village, early risers would be in the middle of their farmwork. But Opobo, the Local Council Chairman, has had to suspend his work earlier than usual today. Recent incidents in the village have prompted him to call a quick meeting. He is seeking out his fellow elder Mzee Sekadde for urgent consultation.*

**Opobo:** (*seeing his friend in front of his hut; talking loudly*)  
Have you heard? Mzee Sekadde... Have you heard?

**Sekadde:** What makes an old man shout as if someone else is sleeping with his new bride! Mzee Opobo, what is the matter, my friend?

**Opobo:** Don't joke, my brother, our happy days are numbered. Something is after our lives.

**Sekadde:** What is wrong, Chairman? What have I not heard?

**Opobo:** All his children are dead. They were found dead in their beds. No one can tell for sure what killed them.

**Sekadde:** What! Whose children? Another deaths?

**Opobo:** Have you ever heard of a death with swollen bellies?

**Sekadde:** Yes, but those were many, many years ago. My late father told me about that.

**Opobo:** And what kind of illness could this be? His wife met me in my garden and told the news.

**Sekadde:** Whose children, Chairman? Whose family?

**Opobo:** Oyire's! Oyire's! Their bellies were like footballs.

**Sekadde:** Poor man! Poisoned! That is it. They were poisoned! But why? Why would this happen? Oh! When the rain traps a man, the downpour never stops! Isn't he the fellow who lost his bull just a week ago?

**Opobo:** Yes. He has been visited by an ugly owl.

*Silence from both men; they look at each other, despondent.*

**Sekadde:** We must go and stand by his side. Rocks must be together to brave a flood. Death should not turn us into cowards. It seems this poisoning will soon have us all.

**Opobo:** You are right, my brother. We need to go as elders and stand with him. That is why his wife came to me.

**Sekadde:** All three of his kids! But what could have happened?

**Opobo:** I saw it rain and shine at the same time yesterday. And it went on for a very long time. This could be the spell that has come to haunt our village. Such shiny rains bring bad luck.

**Sekadde:** Opobo, it cannot be that. Old age has started taking its toll on you. Why do you forget so fast? Our elders used to say this only shows a leopard is giving birth in some distant bush.

*The two men walk away from Sekadde's home and onto the road.*

**Opobo:** Let us forget this supersitious talk. We need to get moving. I know you; you never shut your mouth when you start talking about your grandfather and his magic that made trees bend for him everytime he went hunting for herbs and medicines. We need to go to Oyire's place.

**Sekadde:** He was a great man, that, my grandfather.

**Opobo:** So while we are there, let us have a small meeting to arrange the burial of the bodies. We will need some money. Do you have any? You know I have just finished re-thatching my young wife's house.

**Sekadde:** Let me run back to my house and then we go.  
*(He runs back to his house.)*

*A pensive Opobo is left on the road alone.*

**Opobo:** We live in a strange world. Who ever thought that a man could loose so many things in a single misfortune? Then how does a man survive? There were wars of liberation; then came cattle rustling. There was *slim*. We have just finished chorela; now this! And it kills only within a night! Better slim, chorela, liberation wars, cattle rustling, and not these football stomachs!

*Sekadde reappears and rejoins Opobo on the road.*

**Sekadde:** These times must be harsh. The old man has learnt to quarrel with the road?

**Opobo:** Aha, I have not seen a man struck like Oyire has been.

**Sekadde:** Yes, we should be safe. And for Oyire, even if he doesn't show sorrow, surely his heart is greiving.

*They walk down the road together.*

## Scene 2

*In a London home: It is a luxurious home, fixed with the recent state-of-the-art furniture and several gadgets. Tired, Matt Brown is back from walking the family dog, Owen. He is in time for the BNN newscast on the top of the hour. His wife has just returned from town.*

**Matt Brown:** *(in shorts and a T-shirt, talking to his wife)* Damn, London is hot today! Even in the evenings. Hallo, my love, how was your day?

**Emmy Brown:** It was hectic!

**Matt Brown:** Did you go to the supermarket to pick up Owen's food? We have walked for almost an hour. He must be very hungry!

**Emmy Brown:** Matt, don't you remember that I was to visit Andrew at Cardiff? That is where I have been today, all afternoon. I have just come back too, and I am really tired. I didn't get to the supermarket. We can go tomorrow. Don't worry about Owen; there is enough left for him in the kitchen.

**Matt Brown:** All right. What's in the news today? Pass me the remote. I have heard there were floods in China that killed thousands. Did you get a chance to read that story?

**Emmy Brown:** No, I haven't; sad news. I have been following the Conservative Party elections. John Pyne is standing in Huntingdon. Do you think he stands a chance?

**Matt:** Against who? Mark Clark?

**Emmy Brown:** Yeah, isn't it kind of funny?

**Matt Brown:** Well, let's wait and see. Let's see, what time is it? Ah, it's news time. What has Duncan got for us this evening!?

*Both Matt and Emmy focus on the television.*

**Duncan Foster:** (*BNN news bells*) Welcome back, I'm Duncan Foster. News reaching us from Africa is of a strange incident in the remote village of Kayunga in the Sahara. Three children from one family were yesterday found dead in their beds. Villagers suspect it is a case of poisoning. But some among them are blaming the ill intentioned hand of a traditional healer, a witch of some sort. Let's now turn to our correspondent Peter Stokes in Ndeeba, the capital of Sahara. Peter, you visited the area, Kayunga, which is about 100 kilometers from the capital; what have you gathered about this story?

**Peter Stokes:** Well Duncan, the cause of the deaths is still unknown. There's no local health centre to do an autopsy here, so we cannot tell exactly what caused the deaths. The bereaved family had to bury them this afternoon; the bodies were starting to give an awful odor. Of course, there is little medical sophistication here; villagers can't have bodies treated. But everyone here is puzzled by this death. Eyewitnesses say the bodies had bites, presumably snake bites.

**Duncan Foster:** Has this kind of thing happened before in the area? Is there a history of this kind, which causes people to suspect snakes?

**Peter Stokes:** Well Duncan, group deaths are not a new phenomenon here in southern Sahara. In fact, just last year thousands were killed by what appeared to be some sort of cult. This sent the entire region into consternation. Any deaths here cause panic, so leaders are trying to be cautious. There are fears of an epidemic outbreak.

**Duncan Foster:** You said it is suspected that the children might have died of snakebites. How true could this be? Did you see anything that could make such a suspicion stand?

**Peter Stokes:** Well, yes. Duncan, we are talking about 100 kilometers away from any city. And this is Sahara; this is still a very pre-historic place. There are bushes all over and most people walk barefoot. This is a very good breeding area for snakes. You really can't rule them out. Even at the burial of the children, one snake was killed and one of the villagers remarked that snakes were once good neighbors! So all indications show that snakes could be rampant in this bush.

**Duncan Foster:** Strange indeed. Let's hope there is not a snake epidemic in store for the people of Sahara. Thanks, Peter, for the update. Now we turn to the other stories making headlines this hour. Police in Burma have...

*Matt Brown turns down the volume of the TV.*

**Matt Brown:** This is another sad story. I have always said that we need to help Africa. What have we

done there, as rich a country as we are?  
If we can, we do need to do something.

**Emmy Brown:** Yeah, we need to help. See how bad we can be? We are letting people die of snake bites! That is a horrifying story. I will speak to our church on Sunday and see if there's a way we can organize a mission to this area. We can even do a bit of fundraising. Can you organize something at the office? What do you think, Matt?

**Matt Brown:** I think it's a wonderful idea. And we'll contribute ourselves. This is a very terrible story. Let me continue to think about what we can do. By the way, what are we having for dinner? Should we go out? Did the milkman show up?

**Emmy Brown:** Yes, yes, he came; there's some milk in the fridge. Hey, didn't you say that we were going to the movies tonight?

**Matt Brown:** Yap. You ready? We can also have our dinner that side. I'll also ready myself in a minute.

**Emmy Brown:** Yes! I have been looking forward to this all day; I even talked about it while at Cardiff. Let me go see what to wear for the evening. Yes, yes! (*She's excited and dashes off*)

*[Curtain]*

## Scene 3

*At a village meeting in Kayunga, villagers are seated in Oyire's courtyard, the home of the bereaved family. Oyire's house is iron-roofed and gives the impression of much wealth, compared to others. Most of the neighbors live in grass-thatched houses. Oyire, Opobo, and Sekadde are consulting with a few other villagers. As they continue to talk, more people gather, finding anything they can put their bottoms on.*

**Opobo:** Oyire, my brother, you have seen a lot in your days. This tragedy that has befall your home two days ago, was like a trial against a king's emissary; it leaves you only for the dead. But I have known you as a strong man; we survived polio when we were growing up; then cholera came when the rains went mad.

**Sekadde:** We even survived cattle rustling together. Those were hard days.

**Opobo:** Yes. I know you will not commit suicide. When a lion falls ill and grows thin, it does not become a cat. You will remain a lion in Kayunga. We have seen these calamities before. Isn't that so, my brothers?

**Sekadde:** Hmm, we were together.

**Oyire:** (*calmly*) I will, my brother. And now that you are here, I will stand strong. Thanks for

coming. Teeth are only strong when still bound together.

**Opobo:** (*pensive*) Apart from the massacres that happened during the wars of liberation, that time when a man's death was not different from that of a dog, I have not seen a thing like this one. What is the problem with our village nowadays? Where are these deaths coming from?

**Opio:** (*cuts in*) We know, Chairman! We know what killed Oyire's children! I don't know why old age has chosen to start with eating your eyes.

**Opobo:** (*caught off-guard*) What happened? Tell us, our brother! When elders whisper together, they never fail to see even the inside of a fly's stomach. Speak, *Bwana* Opio.

**Opio:** Oyire is the richest man here. All of us know it. He has all that we do not have. Do you see? His house has an iron roof; it is bigger than ours. He has a big kitchen, and a larger herd. Someone is envious of his wealth. Those children were bewitched! And we know who the witch is.

*There is silence.*

**Opobo:** Mzee Opio has spoken. Is this so? I have doubts. This is illness. This is what happened when we had *slim*, people thought it was witchcraft! It were the white people who opened our eyes.

*Silence, no one speaks.*

**Opio** (*Going on, somewhat agitated*): They fear. You fear to say. No one will speak out. Cowards!

**Opobo:** If no one is speaking, then it means that no one agrees with you *Bwana* Opio. In the years I have been in this world, I have learnt that when we fail to explain strange things, we evoke the invisible hand of witchcraft. Our fathers believed malaria was a curse from the gods. They continued to sacrifice their chickens without looking for the grasses that had the cure. If government hadn't given us nets, they would have never have stop offering ritual sacrifice!

**Lutalo:** Chairman, I think different.

**Opobo:** Yes! Speak, *Bwana* Lutalo! What do you think? What could be the cause?

**Lutalo:** The snakes. I know Mzee Opio might also say the snakes were sent by the old woman in Oyire's neighborhood, who many have accused of witchcraft. I know she conflicted with Oyire when his herds demolished her potato garden. But really, should we defecate in our houses for fear of darkness? The woman stood up against Oyire for his carelessness with his herd. But you all saw; that woman bereaved with us yesterday. Just a few days back, her only cow died. And we confirmed it was due to snakebite. Snakes killed Oyire's children. Why are we blind?

**Oyire:** I also believe it was snakes. *Bwana* Lutalo has spoken my mind. I apologized to the grandmother. My herdsmen had been careless

that day while my animals grazed near her potato garden. About my children, they came back crying of thirst and pain from small wounds. Then the wounds started to protrude. My children couldn't say what had happened.

**Opobo:** You didn't ask?

**Oyire:** No, I didn't. But I realized after they had died. I think the snakes bit them while they hunted for mangoes. I went to the bush yesterday and found two dead snakes near that good mango tree. My sons must have killed them afterwards.

**Opobo:** But why wouldn't the children tell you?

**Oyire:** Old man, thieves don't talk, even if a red-hot spike were to be pushed through their anuses! My children had received no permission from the owner of the garden.

**Opobo:** You have spoken, my brother. So we need to deal with the snakes. Now we have a problem on our hands. We need not to continue thinking in that line of witchcraft.

**Sekadde:** I have always told you, we need to work together to keep our village clean. What happened to the *bulungi bwa nsi* initiative? We had a firm spirit of collective responsibility to clean our village through that initiative. Are we waiting for the government to do something? Now we have snakes! Do we have to sit on our hands and wait for our selfish government!

**Opobo:** Enough of the quarreling, *Bwana* Sekadde. Now that we know the cause of this calamity, let's start looking around for the medicine. We can't

sit on our hands like children. Snakes might finish us off if we choose to just sit by. They are finishing off our cattle and our children!

**Sekadde:** Where do we start, my brothers? And we need to start now.

**Oyire:** We should start with clearing the bush. There are so many thickets around us. These snakes are not coming from afar. As our elders have said, “that which kills the king is always in the courtyard, it will never come from afar.” It is this bush.

**Villager I:** Let us create committees. I will head the snake hunters group. We can first try killing those we encounter as we clear the bush. Let’s have a medicine committee for quick treatment if someone is bitten.

**Oyire:** That is wonderful. Just the other day, I was taking a count from reports by the young boys; they have seen six cobras in the village. This is dangerous. Those may not need any medicines, just people that can club them to death.

**Lutalo:** I will work with the hunters committee. We’ll get sticks and drop them at all crossroads for people to quickly have something to hit any snakes they come across. Someone should head the *Luyiina* group; we need to burn down bushes in many places. If they do not get burnt, we will cut them down.

**Opobo:** Indiscriminate bush burning may even finish off our plantations and famine will have its fangs on us. We can avoid that. But now that you have come out in big numbers like this, it is a good start people. I will work with my old friend Sekadde and continue to mobilize people. Go and inform all those that have remained at home. Tell your wives and children to be on their guard, and ask the men in the neighboring villages to join. Let's start tomorrow.

**Oyire:** Thanks for the initiative, Chairman.

**Opobo:** It is quite late; your wives must be getting worried. Go home. I will stay here at Oyire's place and keep him company. If anyone wants to stay, I'm sure Mr Oyire will be impressed.

*The villagers leave, except Sekadde.*

**Sekadde:** I will stay here too. I just hope Oyire has some sour juice. (*Almost whispering*) By the way, there used to be unmarried girls around this place. Are they still there? They were good singers.

**Opobo:** You and women! You don't even respect tragedy! Even with a grayed head!

**Sekadde:** Who told you a man should not be energized in bad times!

**Opobo:** Now you have started. Lets go inside the house and keep there. There should be some coffee in the house.

*[Curtain]*

## ACT TWO

### Scene 1

*At a park in London: A concert named "Saving Sahara" is ongoing. Thousands of people have turned up. The Brown family is in attendance too. There are loud murmurs contending for space with music. People are holding placards reading "London for Sahara", "One Love", "Not Again" and several others. The MC calls for attention.*

MC: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I wanna take this opportunity to welcome everybody to this fundraising concert. I want to also thank our entertainers and musicians that have volunteered to perform tonight. Over twenty groups from around the UK and the US have volunteered to perform. In fact, we couldn't even book all the groups and stars that wanted to be here on this stage tonight. We wanna thank you so much! Our guest of honor, the Mayor of Westminster Mr Richard English is here and he will be launching the fundraising soon. This concert, Save Sahara, could not have come at a better time! This is the time for us to step up and save Africa! As we are seated here now, an epidemic of snakes is consuming an entire village down in Sahara. Children, adults, livestock, and crops are dying.

They need our help! And here we are, ready to save them! And I wanna thank you, the audience, for taking the time to come, and taking time to care.

*The audience applauds itself.*

Mayor English will officially open the evening, and then we'll get right to our first actors from the artistes of this year, "Daft Londoners." They will do a song they were inspired to write the moment they heard of the tragedy: *The World for Sahara!*

*The audience applauds. The mayor is then invited onto the podium to give his remarks.*

**Mayor Richard English:** Thanks so much to our host this evening. Thanks to the bands and singers who have volunteered to entertain and raise awareness of this tragedy in Africa, and thank you to all the folks who have come. I'm indeed honored to be here and head this fundraising, which is meant to save villages. We are honored to have the opportunity to extend our helping hand. Our country has a long history of conquests and wars. It also has a great history of extending civilization and spreading love. We have reached out over the centuries to so many places across the world. We continue to do that today, not by sending armies this time, but by sending hope.

*Applause*

We are a rich nation, rich in so many ways. And so we have the great opportunity and ability to help the poor, the downtrodden, the wretched of the earth. We cannot let millions of people die on our watch.

*Audience begins to chant, "Not on our watch!"*

Not due to snakes! Not this time!

*Audience begins to chant: "Not this time!"*

Although I am an elected official, I know that we cannot wait for governments to act. We as a people, as individuals in our respective capabilities, can do something. I am personally donating five thousand pounds to this cause. We should help Sahara overcome this crisis and the time is now...The time is now. Thank you so much. May God bless you!

*Audience begins to chant: "The time is now!"*

**MC:** Thank you, Mayor English. The people of London must be very proud of you, a strong leader and example in a time of crisis, a caring man in a cruel world.

*Cheers from the crowd*

Let me bring to the stage our first performers: The Daft Londoners. This was the first group that stepped up when the call was made. Join me in welcoming The Londoners!

*The audience claps as The Londoners go on stage, a group of three hip-hop artists.*

**Lead Singer:** (speaking) Thank you! Hallo people! I don't hear you!! (*Shouting*) This is a promise we make to you, friends in the cause. The Londoners will visit Ndeeba, the capital city of Sahara, and stage a concert for that troubled village, Kayunga. Big up, everyone! (*He starts to sing*).

*Enter the Browns discussing the event, as the music deadens in the background. They seem to be walking away from the event*

**Emmy Brown:** This is an amazing response! It like the one we had at church yesterday.

**Matt Brown:** Yes! This is a good response. What happened at church?

**Emmy Brown:** So many of them had seen the news and wanted to help. They collected items of all kinds; shoes, clothes, bags, mosquito nets. Brother Samson and a group will be heading to Sahara a few days from now. They are going to work with the community.

**Matt Brown:** That is wonderful. Would you be going too?

**Emmy Brown:** I would love to. What do you think?

**Matt Brown:** I think that would be noble of you. Hey, my love, I have a meeting tomorrow at the Consulate. We can talk about this on the way, let's get back home, I need to catch some rest. Let's talk in the car.

**Emmy Brown:** No problem. Let's go.

**Matt Brown:** Okay.

*They walk away from the concert crowd towards their car. The music deadens in the background*

Oh, that was a great show! Yes. The mayor gave a good speech.

**Emmy Brown:** I liked it too. It was great. You should also think about donating. What do you think?

**Matt Brown:** You are right. I parked over here, Sweetie. There's the car. We need to get moving. I want to see the 9 o'clock news. I need an update on this snake story. It's now a week since I last heard anything new. But I glanced at the daily yesterday, is it 500 dead now? This is serious.

**Emmy Brown:** Let's dash home and find out. BNN probably has the most accurate update.

*They drive off.*

*[Curtain]*

*Matt Brown at home in their living room, watching the TV news. He's stone silent; the TV is running. The bells announce the start of the news.*

**Duncan Foster:** It is 9 o'clock GMT, welcome to this hour of news coming to you from London. I am Duncan Foster. Coming up in this hour: Snakes in the Sahara. We continue to report on the story of poisonous snakes that have run rampant in a small village in Sahara. Also up in the news: Dancing for Sahara. Pop stars across the world organize a concert to raise aid for Sahara. (Bells) Civil war in the Amazon: we bring you the story of the rebel fighting groups that have joined forces to defeat a common enemy: the

tyrannical regime in the small coastal country of the Amazon. (*Bells*) We start with the snakes that are demolishing an entire village in the third world. It has been a week since this story broke. A strange snake epidemic has victimized the tiny defenseless village of Kayunga and has brought the villagers on their knees. So far 150 people have been reported dead and 100 head of cattle as well. Here in London a concert has been organized to raise assistance for these tragic victims.

**Matt Brown:**

(*Turning down the volume of the TV a bit*) this is a really dangerous situation. What are we seeing here? Is this really happening in the world? Where are all the good intentioned people of the world? (*Calling*) Emmy! Emmy... Where are you? (*He listens and hears water running in the bathroom*) Oh, she's gone to take a shower. Oh good heavens, I'm so tired just watching this going on in the world.

*He slumps into a chair.*

## ACT THREE

### Scene 1

*In Kayunga, Brother Samson has arrived. His team is fully armed. They have brought solar powered snake guns, clothes, shoes, and food. The missionaries also have brought money to facilitate the locals in fighting the snakes. They are in an open meeting with the village elders with some other people present.*

**Opobo:** Welcome, brothers and sisters. Welcome indeed! Although the colors of our skins may be different, we are brothers and sisters. We are happy for your hand in this. London is not very near. You have come from a far place to help us. We have been trying to fight the snakes and we will continue trying. The biggest burden is in our hands. The relative of the dead man holds the rotten part when a neighbor comes to give a hand. We will not sit back; we are going to do the dirty work. Thanks for coming and thanks for all the things you have brought us!

**Brother Samson:** Thank you for your kind words Mr Opobo. Thank you to the elders: Mr. Opobo and Mr. Sekadde. Thanks for welcoming us. My name is Brother

Samson Dally; I am the head of this delegation. I have come with a team of ten from my church, from North London. Some of our team members are still in London and will be joining us soon. We have come to join in the fight against this epidemic. We are ready to work with you and make sure that you are a free community.

**Sekadde** *[interjecting]*: That is very true, our brother.

**Brother Samson**: We have brought a few things here that can help strengthen the fight against these vipers. We have solar powered guns; can you bring them over here, Emmy? These guns convert the sun's power to electricity and use that electricity to electrocute and kill the snakes. (*He mentions each item that is picked up from a heap of many items and shown to the elders*). We have brought clothes and shoes; these are for the children and some elders. We have also brought money to help in our work around the village. We will make sure that the snakes are eradicated.

**Sekadde**: We are so grateful. Our ancestors said: the ungrateful lad will never have providers. My white brothers and sisters, we are indeed grateful. But as you may see, we are a poor community. All around us are huts. We stay in those small shelters you see. We may

fail to safely keep the things you are giving us before they are put to proper use. I suggest we work together and construct a storage building and maybe an office for safekeeping of these gifts.

**Opobo:** I had not thought about it, *Bwana* Sekadde, that is a wonderful idea! I really support that. There are boys in our area nowadays with long fingers. Our new gadgets may disappear within a day.

**Brother Samson:** Yes, I think that we will do that. I think it's a great idea. And what about the money? How do we keep it safe? Maybe brother Opobo can help by keeping our money, and redistributing it to the needy people.

**Sekadde:** That would be a wonderful idea. We need to create some very useful projects.

**Oyire:** [pointing to Opobo] And being that he is our Local Council Chief, he is the best person to lead this effort.

**Sekadde:** I am only afraid for his hut. The old man's hut is really in a bad shape. We might need to build him a small permanent house, not as big as that of Oyire, but one that is strong enough, one that doesn't leak, and can stand a storm, if one came.

**Opobo:** My house stopped leaking. I have just finished re-thatching.

**Brother Samson:** [Grins], well, I see Mr. Sekadde's point; we are going to have to build you something small and slightly stronger, since you are chairman of the area. I can mobilize these funds right away. (*Some silence*) Now, brothers, let's drive back to the city with these things. We'll bring some for the time we will be here, as we progress in the construction of the storage building and Mr Opobo's house. After they are done, we'll move everything here. Meanwhile, we will ask you to distribute the solar guns so that the snake hunt can start. We'll stay for two weeks and we'll oversee the constructions and this war against the snakes.

*As Brother Samson speaks, other members of his group are taking photographs.*

**Sekadde:**

We give thanks to our white brothers and sisters. I want to ask our Local Council chief to give us a small piece of land from his large property so that we have a place to build the storage.

**Opobo:**

I have no problem with donating the land. My father was a big landowner and I am the heir to the whole of it. I will gladly offer the land.

**Brother Samson:** Thank you.

**Sekadde:** Thank you, my brother. I knew you would not disappoint us. Brother Samson, you are very good people, even our government to which we pay taxes has failed to show up and help, and you are here! Thanks a lot.

**Opobo:** Government is not here. People from afar are here.

**Sekadde:** I have an idea. I wanted to ask for a place where we can provide medical treatment for our injured people, if possible a hospital. The only hospital we have here is 35 miles away from our village.

**Opobo:** Well said, my brother.

**Sekadde:** We may need to be helped, Brother Samson.

**Brother Samson:** (*Asking his crew*) Is anyone writing this down? I have actually not seen a health centre anywhere near here. Yes, I think we passed a hospital many miles back, right?

**Sekadde:** It is 35 miles away, my brother. We have almost been ignored.

**Brother Samson:** Thanks for the idea, Mr. Sekadde. We may help. Yes, I think we may help. We shall build a medical facility.

*[Brief pause]*

Thanks, everyone. Let's have the guns distributed.  
*(Addressing the elders)* Mr. Opobo, you said you will guide us through the bush so that we can test the solar guns and show you how to use them. I hope that at least every three homes in a neighborhood can have a gun. We should be able to send more when we get back to London.

**Opobo:** Yes, Brother Samson, we can start moving through the bush. *(Addressing the other villagers)* Should we go with our brothers and hunt for some of these reptiles?

**Voices of elders:** Yes, we are here.

**Opobo:** That is good. Those with guns, come on, let's lead the way. Brother Samson, let's get going.

*They walk off to the bush.*

## Scene 2

*In London, at the Browns' home: Matt Brown is talking with his wife over dinner after her return from Sahara.*

**Matt Brown:** You know what? Since your intervention, the snake situation is improving. The news yesterday said that the situation was getting back to normal. Job well done!

**Emmy Brown:** The last reports I got were that about five people and seven animals per day died in the past week. It was a sharp improvement from 20 people per day.

**Matt Brown:** Are you kidding me? That was a serious epidemic! How long has it been since you were there? Two weeks?

**Emmy Brown:** Uh, no, it's been a month. But I feel good about our intervention. Everyone in London should feel good. The west should be doing this kind of thing a lot more. I have been looking forward to this news. And we are sending them more protection. We are considering building them a hospital.

*Matt helps himself to more stew from the dish. He puts some in the dog dish as well, under the table*

**Matt Brown:** Aha, that will be great! You know, your trip was really worthwhile. (*Addressing the dog*) Owen, are you enjoying your dinner? Eat up!

**Emmy Brown:** You know what, Matt, we should thank God; we were hoping for this kind of result.

**Matt Brown:** And this is what I keep telling my colleagues at the consulate: we need to help small nations. Even Jesus said it: rich people are the protectors of the poor. If the rich abandon the poor, God abandons the rich.

**Emmy Brown:** There goes Pastor Brown! Ha ha ha! But you are saying something serious here. This is what we did when we went with Brother Samson. And we will continue doing this work.

**Matt Brown:** That is wonderful.

**Emmy Brown:** I have heard that the government is also putting some money together to send to the government of Sahara.

**Matt Brown:** I think working with the community is better, a situation where you directly work with the community and have that money given to the people, directly, not to government thieves! Africans!

**Emmy Brown:** Yeah. That's what we are doing.

**Matt Brown:** Let me take this him for a bath. Owen, get up, you can't sleep in your dish. Let's go take a bath!

**Emmy Brown:** Thanks, Matt. Owen, go with Daddy for your bath.

*Matt Brown carries the squirming dog away. Emmy Brown is left alone at the dinner table.*

**Matt Brown:** (*Going away*) This dog is getting heavy!  
What do you eat, puppy?

**Emmy Brown:** (*Shouting*) The usual stuff. (*To herself*)  
Aah, how I wish those children in Sahara  
can eat like we do here. God, give me  
the strength to go on.

## Scene 3

*Sekadde and his friend Opobo are in light conversation under a tree at Opobo's home. They are having tea as they talk. It is early morning in Kayunga.*

**Opobo:** At least we can breathe; we are able to go to bed and catch some sleep. There are fewer snakes nowadays. The curse is going down. We used to hear stories that whites have great magic. Now, I know it to be true, for I have seen it with my own eyes.

**Sekadde:** You have seen how these bazungu guns work? They would make a viper impotent with just one shot! Can you believe it? I have heard that only two snakes were killed in the past two weeks! Is that the case? I have not been following closely. Been busy finishing my small house, I got some balance off their gifts. Man eats where he works, you know that?

**Opobo:** Well, I have heard one death reported in the past month. Two months since our white friends were here, life has moved on; we are like kings! A lot has changed.

**Sekadde:** I think all the snakes were killed. The remnants must be very few indeed.

**Opobo:** But at least we now have a hospital and a village storage building. The hospital will be completed very soon. It is such a good ending of a crisis.

*A [educated] man comes in pacing first with a newspaper in hand.*

What has happened? You are running like a bull smelling a cow on heat! What is it?

**Sekadde:** (*laughing*) Whose bull did you see run like that? (*Addressing the visitor*) Yes, educated man, ignore our old chairman. What is in the papers today?

**Educated Man:** You are in a story here!

**Sekaddde:** Who? Me?

**Educated Man:** Both of you!

**Sekadde:** Really?

**Educated Man:** There is a story here about the snake epidemic that we have just survived. They applauded you two for your good cooperation, that you helped our white friends a lot.

**Opobo:** When did you get this paper?

**Educated Man:** Today! You remember the white man that was bitten by the adder, down at the well? He died, although we thought he had fully recovered. Even his white friends thought he had recovered.

**Opobo:** Poor man!

**Educated Man:** They were yesterday honoring him as a hero. See what they wrote here?

**Opobo:** Read for us, educated man, we are some old idiots!

**Educated Man:** "...we will remember him as one of our brave men and women who die serving humanity in the forgotten corners of the world. John McDonald joins those who fought so hard to protect our great empire, and transfer civilization across the globe...he will remain an inspiration and a hero of our time." This was the mayor of London speaking at the burial ceremony. And your names are mentioned as the men who worked hard to end the epidemic.

**Opobo:** Hmm. Where are our names?

**Educated Man:** Here [showing them] Chief Bulasio Sekadde and Chairman Chris Opobo.

**Educated Man:** See the pictures? [*The men crane their necks and stare at the paper*].

**Sekadde:** It must have been a big function. There's even a band! They look so smart! Thanks, my brother, we didn't educate you for nothing. You have brought us great news. Where did you get this newspaper from?

**Educated Man:** I got the paper from my father's brother, the one who stays in the city, and as I read, I saw your names and your faces. Let me go and take his paper back to him; he might be going any time soon.

**Sekadde:** Thanks, young man. Greet your uncle for us!

*Educated man runs off.*

**Sekadde:** How can we get a copy of this paper and show to our fellow elders? We are bigger than we were before. We are in the papers!

**Opobo:** Things change so fast either for good or for bad. We have changed, not like foolish dried saliva, which leaves the inside of the mouth and pastes itself on the cheek; it will never taste the grape! We are big!

**Sekadde:** My old friend, the things that happen nowadays remind me of our old days when we were herders. Our grandfathers rightly said: the tears of a cow are the joy of a dog. Can you imagine? Our society has been transformed this much on the back of a crisis!

**Opobo:** Because of the snakes!

**Sekadde:** Yes.

**Opobo:** Ha ha ha. What you are saying is true. Our elders were right. The tears of a cow are a man's joy: He eats meat every time a cow dies.

**Sekadde:** My brother, we need to keep these calamities going. Sometimes, as we have seen, they are good calamities. Life-improving calamities!

**Opobo:** What are you saying my friend! Calamities are calamities!

**Sekadde:** What don't you see, Opobo? Have your eyes gotten eaten by jiggers? Look, you are not the same; two months ago, you only had a hut, now, you compete with the man at the end of the village, Mr. Oyire. You have a house that people can really call a house.

**Opobo:** Ha ha ha. Do not say this openly; otherwise people will hate us instead.

**Sekadde:** My brother, don't you realize that this was a good tragedy? It has built you a house. We have a strong storage building in the village. So many people in our village have bicycles that were bought for them to facilitate the snake hunt.

**Opobo:** My brother, talk softly, the wind might carry away your words. (*Talking in reduced voices*) By the way, you have said it correctly; I was looking at my first wife's lads yesterday as they went to fetch water; all of them wore those big shoes. See, even myself, I had only these *tangira enyana*; they are terrible things. I now have real shoes!

*They burst out laughing.*

**Sekadde:** By the way, as many of our people have died, I have seen a general feeling of happiness among those still living. You know what our fathers would say: nations are built on dead bodies. Snakes have built us prosperity!

**Opobo:** Let us go into the house, old man. (*They stand*) I have seen your mouth turning sweet with bad words; and when a man is eating, he should not talk, otherwise you get choked!

*[As they walk]*

**Sekadde:** Eh, I have always told you things. In those rich countries, in America and England, I have heard that there are no beggars, no poor people like there are here. But do you think they were really not there since the start of the world?

**Opobo:** Eh, what happened to them?

**Sekadde:** They were killed! To end poverty, you kill all the beggars, and the poor people; that is the way.

**Opobo:** How evil they must be!

**Sekadde:** But they are better off, and they are kind! Haven't you seen them? But I have told you how they managed their start. My eyes are like those of a marabou stork; they see further!

**Opobo:** (*laughing*) You God blessed braggart! Who told you that?

**Sekadde:** You saw how I wooed the muzungu to build us a health center? Now, let me tell you something: you can even stand for a bigger office and claim to the people that you helped them build a hospital when you were just a Local Council chief.

**Opobo:** (*laughing*) Are you serious?

**Sekadde:** Yes! Think about it, if this snake epidemic went on for one more month, you would even have seen a road being built in our area.

**Opobo:** I hope you have not been intoxicated by wealth. (*Changing subject*) By the way, you saw that man who died of drinking? Money! Money! These white brothers brought us money. And at some point, men died of money. See how strange the world can be?

**Sekadde:** Yes. Our men enjoyed women and *waragi*. And that stuff kills once taken without control. You should have seen a *waragi* burial. All the men

**Opobo:** Eh, what happened to them?

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**Sekadde:** Yes. Our men enjoyed women and *waragi*. And that stuff kills once taken without control. You should have seen a *waragi* burial. All the men

at the burial were enjoying the potent stuff like  
they would not live to see the next day!

**Opobo:** (*laughing*) I saw it! But you controlled yourself  
so well that day. Have you seen the old man at  
the corner take on a second wife? Eh, money  
marry; money marry! Just like that.

**Sekadde:** That fellow was in charge of all the bicycles.  
I heard he sold one or two in the neighboring  
villages. Can you imagine that! Now he has  
another wife.

**Sekadde:** Hmm. I can imagine. Now, would you consider  
that thing I have told you about standing for  
the next office?

**Opobo:** I am still thinking, now that you have told me.

**Sekadde:** I really think it is something you need to look  
into so as to drive our community and yourself  
forward. Men never rest their heads till they  
reach the graves.

**Opobo:** But will this money keep coming, now that all  
the snakes are dead?

*[Inside the house, seated]*

**Sekadde:** This is my next point. We need to ensure that  
our friends in London keep helping us. Let  
us think together. I think they too really like  
giving a hand; you saw them in the pictures  
from the young man's paper? They were so  
smart!

**Opobo:** Hmm? So what do you propose?

**Sekadde:** First go see if your wife is coming in any time soon.

*[He stands and peeps]*

**Opobo:** *[as he moves]* now you, man with tall eyes, I don't know what mischief is boiling in your head. My wife is busy with her cooking. She won't be coming to the house any time soon.

**Sekadde:** These people built you a nice house!

**Opobo:** Hmm. They did.

**Sekadde:** These people brought you new clothes!

**Opobo:** You are right.

**Sekadde:** These people have even enabled you to find a concubine. I know that woman you started chewing the other day.

**Opobo:** *Gwe.* Speak softly. But you are right.

**Sekadde:** *(after some silence)* Here is my proposition: a chameleon will never die on one skin; when the surroundings change, it does the same. We need to be like that small animal.

**Opobo:** Hmm. What are you saying my old friend?

**Sekadde:** Let me give one more piece of wisdom, my brother. Our grandparents said, when a ripe anthill moves its eyes from one side to another, a smart harvester moves the traps as well. We need to move the baskets.

**Opobo:** What do you mean?

**Sekadde:** Snakes brought us wealth

**Opobo:** Yes.

**Sekadde:** Why don't we start a snake farm?

**Opobo:** We become snake farmers! Are you mad?

**Sekadde:** You still haven't understood it.

*Opobo's wife knocks on the door and ushers in a visitor.*

**Wife:** My husband, we have a visitor.

**Opobo:** Let him in. This is a people's home. If a chairman doesn't welcome visitors, then he's not worth the title. I am here.

**Visitor:** Elders, I'm happy to meet the two of you.

**Opobo:** Yes, you are welcome to my home. (*Addressing his wife*) *Mukyaala*, the visitor needs to drink some water. Yes, are you not Tito, my friend's son who got himself a wife last year?

**Visitor:** Yes, I am Tito. I have come to report Mugo. I found my wife singing under Mugo, [pauses] "Bugaali" – that is what they call him nowadays! His neighbor had tipped me. And I have always warned him against it.

**Sekadde:** Yet, you are the only one with the volume switch! (*Laughs*)

**Opobo:** Stop it, old man. This is something serious. Men have killed others for this very reason. Speak, my visitor. Just ignore this old man. Isn't he the fellow we entrusted with the bicycles?

**Visitor:** Yes, Mr Mugo distributed the bicycles during the time of the snake epidemic. He stole some of the bicycles and now he is stealing our wives!

**Sekadde:** This is dangerous! Chairman, we will have to arrest Mugo! Tito is such a kindhearted fellow; he could have killed this adulterous hound!

**Opobo:** By the way, as other men have done before. Now, my old friend; let us later pick up our conversation from where we have stopped. I have to go and settle this.

**Sekadde:** But keep thinking.

**Opobo:** Yes, I'm with you.

*Sekadde leaves*

Now, Tito, I know money has changed so many things in our village, but I will not let you down. Thanks for coming. Let me prepare myself and join you at your home.

**Visitor:** All right, Chairman.

*(Tito leaves.)*

**Opobo:** The Mountain has moved! The basket may not be empty yet!

## Scene 4

*In London, the Browns are having conversation in their living room.*

**Emmy Brown:** Darling, we were at church this afternoon and you know what? We received official communication from the Sahara government appreciating us for our work during the epidemic.

**Matt Brown:** Wow! That is wonderful. So has the epidemic ended?

**Emmy Brown:** Yes, almost. The number of snake deaths being reported has decreased tremendously. And you know what? I think the hospital is such a great idea. I'm going to work hard and see that we finish the construction, fully.

**Matt Brown:** Great! And you know the concert really raised awareness. There's one latecomer to the party, though. I got an email at office today; a friend told me that our government donated to the Sahara government, 300 million dollars. Good money there from a rich nation to a former colony.

**Emmy Brown:** That is a lot of money! Will they use it properly?

**Matt Brown:** Well, our government provided very strict instructions on how the money should be used. I hope they will abide

this time, although it has been lost in corruption generally over the years. We have been helping these countries since World War II. They have not transformed themselves, and we need to keep helping them.

**Emmy Brown:** You know, when I was in Sahara, the villages look like they have never received any help. We need to give them more!

**Matt Brown:** You are right, my dear wife

**Emmy Brown:** Are you still enjoying your golf? It's news time! Can I change the channel?

**Matt Brown:** Yeah, sure.

**Emmy Brown:** Hey, I haven't seen Duncan Foster reading news on TV for quite a time. I thought he had been replaced!

**Matt Brown:** I think he has been on TV more than ten years.

**Emmy Brown:** Aha, they are doing a focus on Africa. I have been watching this thing for the last two weeks; our snake village is not in the news anymore! This means there are no more snakes! There has been no news on this for close to a month! Yes! Yeah!

**Matt Brown:** So you guys did it! Congratulations! We did it. We did it, and we'll do it again.

## Scene 5

*Opobo and Sekadde meet again, this time it is night and they are at Sekadde's home.*

**Sekadde:** Welcome to my home, after such a long time. Our elders have said: when a man takes too long to eat at a friend's house, something is surely not right.

**Opobo:** Thanks for hosting me; I have enjoyed your wife's cooking a lot. Were I not old, I would have stolen her from you (*Laughter*).

**Sekadde:** And now that you have acquired some wealth, you surely can move a mountain! [*They laugh again*]. Will you not be frightened walking back to your home in darkness? Your bones have become so fearful, like those of a middle-aged woman. Teenagers are never afraid of darkness, and neither are very old women!

**Opobo:** Not so much, and after acquiring these soldier-boots from our *muzungu* friends, I walk without fear.

**Sekadde:** Now, about our arrangements, I have moved rather quickly. I have visited the site where we should start the farm.

**Opobo:** Are your children all asleep?

**Sekadde:** Don't mind them; I know these things we are discussing are like hot stones; they can burn a mouth before they are swallowed. Just don't mind the children. I am in control.

**Opobo:** Snakes are poisonous things! We may die while running this farm.

**Sekadde:** Old man! My father was a snake hunter; why do you forget your friend's history? This is a practice he learned from his great-grandfathers. Although I do not have the herbs he used to treat snake poison, I can tame them and release them at will.

**Opobo:** But our people!

**Sekadde:** I have told you how those white men developed. Nations are built on dead bodies, and so is prosperity. The rich men in the city are those who take risks; they take the hard decisions. And here we have an assured stream. Why don't we drink to our fill?

**Opobo:** Hmm, OK. I will support you. But how do we start?

**Sekadde:** I know of an old woman, two villages away; she was coming to help when we were first struck by the epidemic. But when the white people came she abandoned the trip; but she knows all the medicines. With these medicines we can guard our families.

**Opobo:** You mean we have the protective medicines?

**Sekadde:** That is done. But see my point: end of the snakes is the return of poverty! See, did you have any white friends before the snakes came?

**Opobo:** No.

**Sekadde:** You cannot even imagine how many you will have when the epidemic strikes again and without end. See, you are even in the papers!

**Opobo:** I see. So where do we start? We cannot start these farms near our homes; our children and animals may be caught up in the crossfire!

**Sekadde:** Yes, I see your point. I have a forest at the other end of the village. I have often barred villagers from tinkering with it when they are collecting firewood. It is very thick, and big.

**Opobo:** But part of it was burnt, isn't that so?

**Sekadde:** Opobo, you don't know how much wealth our fathers left us; that forest you see there is as large as the Sahara deserts. And all of it is my land. We will go into its belly, in the middle I mean, and hide our farm there. And the epidemic will be back. Snakes take four months to mature and start hunting on their own.

**Opobo:** You never run out of ideas, you old man. I had never thought that grey head keeps such great wisdom. This is something; I'm starting to believe that we can do it. And I'm sure by the time of the second election; I will be an epidemic control hero. Now, I see your idea about a higher office.

**Sekadde:** I have told you! Tomorrow I will be making the trip to see that old woman I told you about. I might spend a night there or even more as she hunts through the bush to gather the seeds of the protective herbs. So let us sit together to plan when I am back from seeing her.

**Opobo:** Ok, you are such a fast-moving man! You don't delay things!

**Sekadde:** And, my brother, this should be our project, only you and I. We are the chiefs.

**Opobo:** That is it. I know. Not even my bride will know of this.

**Sekadde:** I'm sure you still have some money from those projects; let us invest it. Buy some logs, those that were left behind by the lumbermen; we will use those to shield the growing vipers, the way pigs are farmed. We will be visiting the forest in the night to let a few of them free. This we can start doing in four months' time.

**Opobo:** I have heard. Let me work on the logs before you return.

**Sekadde:** Well, at this moment, we can go catch some sleep.

**Opobo:** I'm really tired too. It should be about midnight. This is time for making children. I know many men at this hour are filled with sweat, working hard [*Laughs*].

**Sekadde:** Where did you get that dirty tongue? [*More Laughter*]

**Opobo:** You thought you were alone? (*The two men laugh*) I also have women, my friend. Please find me some light and I hit the road. My bride must be turning in her bed!

*Sekadde gets a lamp and sees his friend off.*

**Sekadde:** I will not escort you too far; let me catch some sleep and prepare for tomorrow's journey. Sleep well.

## Scene 6

*The Browns are in their living room:*

**Matt Brown:** How was church yesterday. Office was dull for me.

**Emmy Brown:** Last Saturday Brother Samson reported that the money was well used. The health centre has started serving the community. We will continue to send drugs there, and any other contributions.

**Matt Brown:** Oh, that poor snake village! How long ago was the first visit? Six, eight months ago! At least those people are safe nowadays! They can go about their business without having to negotiate with cobras and vipers.

**Emmy Brown:** Everything is just right!

**Matt Brown:** Tell me something: did the Daft Londoners do their concert in Sahara?

**Emmy Brown:** They have not gone yet. They have a couple of shows to do here before they can make that trip. But the pastor has kept regular contact with them and they promise they'll do that concert.

**Matt Brown:** So what will the show be for, now that the snake problem has been solved?

**Emmy Brown:** Look, Matt. Africa has many problems. They need us almost every single day

of their lives. Famines, diseases, natural disasters, coups, genocides, you name it. They still need a lot of help – and the solution can only come from here.

**Matt Brown:** You are right. And their leaders, just pathetic people! Lets get to this evening's broadcast before we dash for dinner. I enjoyed that place we were at last time. What was the name?

**Emmy Brown:** "Sahara Chef's Pride", yes: nice name. From Africa, right! They cook very good traditional dishes. Africans must be good cooks.

*[Turning to the TV]*

**Duncan Forster:** (*news bells*) Good evening and welcome to this hour of news. It is 19 GMT, and we are coming to you from our BNN studios in London. Coming up in our lead stories: No end to the snakes! It has been close to eight months since a snake epidemic broke out in a small village in Sahara. Now, the snakes are back! Also in this hour: (*news bells*) going to the moon, South Africa sends its first astronauts. It was at exactly 14 hours Johannesburg time that the spacecraft launched. We'll bring you the details of this amazing breakthrough in an African country. Also ahead: gold at last, a Haitian athlete wins the first gold medal in the history of his country. We

will bring you the details. (*Bells and start of news details, in a more relaxed voice*)

The Bites are Back! Ten people in southern Sahara, most of them children, have been reported dead of snakebites. This is the second time this year that the snakes have struck Sahara, one of the most impoverished countries in Africa. Earlier this year, aid from concerned groups and artists here in Britain and the United States seemed to have conquered this strange epidemic. The scope of this most recent epidemic is yet to be established. We now get to our senior African correspondent, Peter Stokes, who reported on this very epidemic the first time it struck...

*The volume of the television goes down; the Browns look at each other in disbelief. Mrs. Brown goes for the phone.*

**Brown:** What is this we are seeing? Again!

**Emmy:** Oh my God! I don't know whether Brother Samson is watching. I have got to call him! Africa needs us again!

**End**