



### Director's Statement

**I like wild animals as much as the next person, but what drew me to MILKING THE RHINO was the people.** I wanted to tell the story of conservation from the African perspective — something that I, for one, had never seen. Africa is the world's conservation laboratory. But like most Westerners I was ignorant of the dark side of Africa's conservation history: that it furthered the tourism-agendas of colonial governments while displacing and alienating indigenous people. In post-colonial times, conservation has been turned on its head by a growing consensus that the world's remaining wildlife is doomed unless local people are given a say and a stake in preserving it. My goal in MILKING THE RHINO was to explore the nuances and complexities of this new people-centered approach.

I'm captivated by the notion of a community undergoing rapid, radical change. The Himba and Maasai are among the oldest cattle cultures on earth; herding is in their DNA. So for the Il Ngwesi community to retool their economy and lifestyle to favor eco-tourism and conservation – at the expense of grass and space for cattle – is like removing a rib. I'm fascinated by the continuing debate within the community, and by the collision of ancient ways with Western expectations.

My hope is that this film will cause audiences to revise their images of Africa and Africans. Most Westerners see Africa through a haze of reportage about wars, AIDS, poverty, corruption. Rural Africa in particular is viewed as backwards and/or romantically pure. By weaving stories of complex, multi-faceted characters, MILKING THE RHINO breaks with stereotype to paint rural Africans as *akina sisi* – “people like us.”

- David E. Simpson  
July, 2008

*PHOTO: David E. Simpson (left front) with James Ole Kinyaga (right front) at Il Ngwesi Lodge, Kenya*

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