

A CONVERSATION WITH DR. MWALIMU MUSHESHE: EMPOWERING GIRLS AND BOYS TO BE LEADERS IN UGANDA

Interviewed by Riane Eisler, JD, PhD(hon)

Abstract

Riane Eisler talks with Dr. Mwalimu Musheshe, founder of the Uganda Rural Development and Training Institute (URDT), dedicated to preparing male and female young entrepreneurs who have integrity and the capacity to improve their economic situation, become responsible citizens, and contribute to the national development agenda. Dr. Musheshe is also founder and Vice Chancellor of African Rural University (ARU), a university focused on providing **women** with the necessary knowledge, skills, and experience to be effective **rural** development specialists and change agents in their communities, and a leader for community empowerment in Uganda and Africa at large.

Keywords: African Rural University; Uganda Rural Development and Training Institute; Sustainable Development; Women's Empowerment; Community Leaders; African Development; Human Transformation

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Riane Eisler: Dr. Musheshe, you are an outstanding leader in Uganda and in Africa at large, and founder of many organizations and trainings that empower both girls and boys to be future local and regional leaders. What, in your own life, led you to the work you do in with the Uganda Rural Development and Training Program, the African Rural University for Women, and other organizations?

Mwalimu Musheshe: It all began when I was 12 years old. From a humanistic point of view, I took action one night to free someone who had been arrested after being accused of causing the prolonged drought in my area. At school they had told us that rain is an act of God. When I whispered to the man asking whether he was God and he replied no, I knew he was unjustly arrested. I then cut him loose, and cut myself loose, by leaving home. Since then, I have worked to serve others.

I went to a school started by a Scottish veteran of the First World War. His motto, which I follow even today, was “To serve and not to be served.”

At university, I recognized that the question of development today, for Uganda and Africa, was in the hands of the younger generation, and that answers were not in the cities but in the rural areas, if people were well organized to recognize the resources they have. I went to work with communities before graduation as a volunteer in health, agriculture, and microfinance, and that work further strengthened my belief that change is not only possible and probable but real, when the human spirit is unleashed.

I found untapped potential among the youth; with good orientation, they are Africa’s hope today and tomorrow. They are leaders today, with the opportunity to be better leaders tomorrow in a world of connectedness.

Eisler: What are the core principles and goals of this work?

Musheshe: The people of Uganda, like people the world over, are key to their own development. Lasting change can come only if people shift from reacting or adapting to events and circumstances to being the creators of events and circumstances.

People who share a common vision can transcend traditional barriers and prejudices caused by tribal, religious, political, and gender differences, and work together to achieve that which is truly important to them all. People have innate power and wisdom

which they can tap to transform the quality of their lives and that of their communities. Training, education, and sharing of information are key and strategic components of rural transformation programs.

The goal of this work is social, economic, and human transformation in rural Africa in general, and in Uganda in particular.

Eisler: Can you tell us some personal stories from people whose lives were affected by the organizations you have been a part of?

Musheshe: We worked in communities with people with varying traditional skills, and introduced them to the visionary approach. Now they are part of the faculty of African Rural University (ARU; www.aru.ac.ug) as Traditional Wisdom Specialists in areas of organic and sustainable agriculture, governance, and traditional technologies.

Training at the Uganda Rural Development and Training Institute (URDT; <https://urdteduc.ac.ug>) uses the Two Generation (2Gen) Approach Model. Here children from disadvantaged households are enrolled at the school, and their parents and guardians are invited to learn together with them periodically to create the vision of change they want to see at home and in their community.

[Editor's Note: The term 2Gen was coined in the late 1980s by the Foundation for Child Development to reflect programs that were emerging across the country. 2Gen approaches continued to gain traction throughout the early 2000s and reemerged in 2010. In 2012, in partnership with a group of philanthropic partners, Ascend at the Aspen Institute published the *Two Generations, One Future* report that laid the groundwork for the growth and development of the 2Gen field's expansion. Then, with a decade of accomplishments and learnings from its network of Partners and Fellows, Ascend released the landmark *State of the Field: Two Generation Approaches to Family Well-Being* that outlines our vision for exponential expansion and implementation. The

“two-generation” or “2Gen” approach has been and continues to be referred to by many names within and across the field - “whole family,” “intergenerational,” “Ohana Nui,” “multigenerational,” “multi-gen,” “generation to generation,” and “Gen2Gen” - which all encompass the same fundamental principles: 2Gen approaches reflect and embrace the diverse shapes, sizes, and structures of families to ensure all family members can reach their full potential. (<https://ascend.aspeninstitute.org-2gen-approach>).]

At URDT, this model has transformed thousands of homes. Households now have good permanent houses and food self-sufficiency; their income has grown a hundred-fold; their children are attending school; they are environmentally conscious; and 30% have community leadership skills. This has all been made possible through strong partnership across gender divides. In the vocational and leadership training, more than 11,000 young people have been certified in a variety of skills, as carpenters, electricians, plumbers, cosmetologists, and workers in agribusiness.

Peacemaking in the region has brought together Indigenous people and immigrants in a mutual conversation on co-existence; they now live in harmony, unlike the past when they lived in conflict. At the community radio station, members of the community dialogue in leadership to ensure transparency and accountability.

Eisler: How does your work relate to the partnership-domination social scale and to the work of the Center for Partnership Systems (CPS)?

Musheshe: We recognize that both males and females are creators by bringing to reality what they truly care about. We work on the basis of fundamental resources like trust, honesty, dignity, integrity, love, and friendship. By enabling the people, we work to recognize the contributions of every member of the society beyond monetary contributions. This includes community work, health services, community security, care

for the environment, and care for persons with disabilities and older people, guided by the philosophy of Ubuntu.

[Editor's Note: Ubuntu - "I am a person through other people. My humanity is tied to yours." Archbishop Desmond Tutu explained it this way: "One of the sayings in our country is Ubuntu - the essence of being human." (The Clinton Foundation, <https://stories.clintonfoundation.org/the-spirit-of-ubuntu-6f3814ab8596>).]

Eisler: How does your work help women and girls have a voice and take leadership?

Musheshe: Through the 2Gen approach, at the household level, girl children have demonstrated mobilization and leadership skills in organizing their family unit to work together to achieve the goals and visions they set together, and they share accountability based on competences rather than on traditionally gender-defined tasks.

At the community level, graduates of ARU create conditions for members of the community to learn, share information, and formulate shared visions upon which they work together to create sustainable change in their lives. The female graduates are change agents who emerge as leaders in the community.

Through the work of URDT in the community, the percentage of women and youth leaders at different levels has increased from less than 5% to 45%. As an organization, about 75% of URDT's leadership positions are filled by women.

Eisler: Can you tell us more about the curriculum of the African Rural University?

Musheshe: The curriculum is an integrated program called Technologies for Rural Transformation, in which the women students acquire fluency or mastery in Principles of Creating (the capacity for people to create the results they want); Systems Thinking (tools to carry out situational analysis, to understand cause-and-effect relationships

and therefore develop appropriate interventions); and fluency in Sustainable Development and the Three Pillars of Sustainability (Social, Economic, and Environmental). They learn about sustainable agriculture, environmental and ecosystem restoration and management governance, human relations, peace, and justice.

Eisler: Please tell us more about Kagadi Kibaale Community Radio 91.7FM, and how it works in partnership with the communities of Kibaale?

Musheshe: Kagadi Kibaale Community Radio (KKCR), 91.7FM, is part of the East African Community radio project, along with Mangel'ete in Kenya, and Orkonerei Radio Service (ORS FM) in Terrat, Maasai land in Tanzania. The East African Community radio project is a product of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (also called The Earth Summit) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992. KKCR is operated by community-oriented journalists, the community management committee, and URDT. The members of the community use it to discuss a variety of topics ranging from environment, agriculture, and governance to issues of interest to people with disabilities, youth, women, veterans, and refugees. It broadcasts 24 hours a day and is supported by user or host recovery fees.

Eisler: How have you been able to engage decision-makers in the public and private spheres in Uganda and other places?

Musheshe: We organize platforms through community radio and through social media, especially WhatsApp, and being members of networks like Participatory Ecological Land Use Management (PELUM), NGO Forum, Development Network of Indigenous Voluntary Associations (DENIVA), Kitaara Civil Society Organization, ASHOKA, Organic Denmark (Uganda and Tanzania), and the East African University Council. And we participate in government organizations like the National Planning Authority of Uganda.

Eisler: What do you think are the main obstacles to moving to a more equitable and sustainable way of life in Africa, as well as worldwide?

Musheshe: In Africa, it's a mindset issue. People who make decisions are programmed to believe in the traditional colonial and global economic structure, and it's challenging to change that. Historically, people have been oriented toward problem solving, which means that actions are triggered by how the community perceives the magnitude of the problem, rather than their aspirations for the future they truly care about. The education system through all cycles and levels, and precursor faiths or religions were not liberating, and are still dominant in their lives. Culture and social rigidities still exist in some societies.

Eisler: The readers of this journal consist of both scholars and practitioners. How can these two groups support your vital work?

Musheshe: They can conduct research, and communicate and publish their findings. We need professional cross-pollination.

Eisler: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Musheshe: I look forward to strengthened collaboration and partnership as we work toward creating a world that works for all. Thank you so much!

zzDr. Mwalimu Musheshe is the Co-founder and Chairman of the Uganda Rural Development and Training Program (URDT), which has several formal innovative educational institutions that train young people to become catalysts for change by using home-grown methodology. He is a founding member of the African Rural University for Women, which educates change agents who facilitate development on a large scale, and the founder of Kagadi-Kibaale Community Radio 91.7FM, in partnership with the communities of Kibaale to enhance dialogue between community members and policy makers and to ensure accountability. He is an expert in Visionary Leadership, Systems Thinking and Strategic Planning, and

Development Management. He is a certified Instructor, facilitator, mentor, and organizer in the communities using the Visionary Approach to human and rural transformation. Areas of research interest include youth empowerment and employability, girl child emancipation through education, the ecosystems of young entrepreneurs, and African philosophy and cultural anthropology.

Riane Eisler, JD, PhD (hon), is president of the Center for Partnership Systems, Editor-in-Chief of the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies*, and author of *The Chalice and The Blade: Our History, Our Future*; *Sacred Pleasure*; *Tomorrow's Children*; *The Power of Partnership*; and *The Real Wealth of Nations: Creating a Caring Economics*. Her recent book *Nurturing Our Humanity: How Domination and Partnership Shape Our Brains, Lives, and Future* (co-authored with Douglas Fry) combines her research with findings from the social and biological sciences, especially neuroscience. Eisler keynotes conferences worldwide and consults for governments on the partnership model. She authored over 500 articles for outlets including *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Human Rights Quarterly*, and the *International Journal of Women's Studies*.

Correspondence about this article should be addressed to Riane Eisler at eisler@partnershipway.org