Awakening the sleeping genius in each of us

AFRICAN RURAL UNIVERSITY

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MAGAZINE 2026

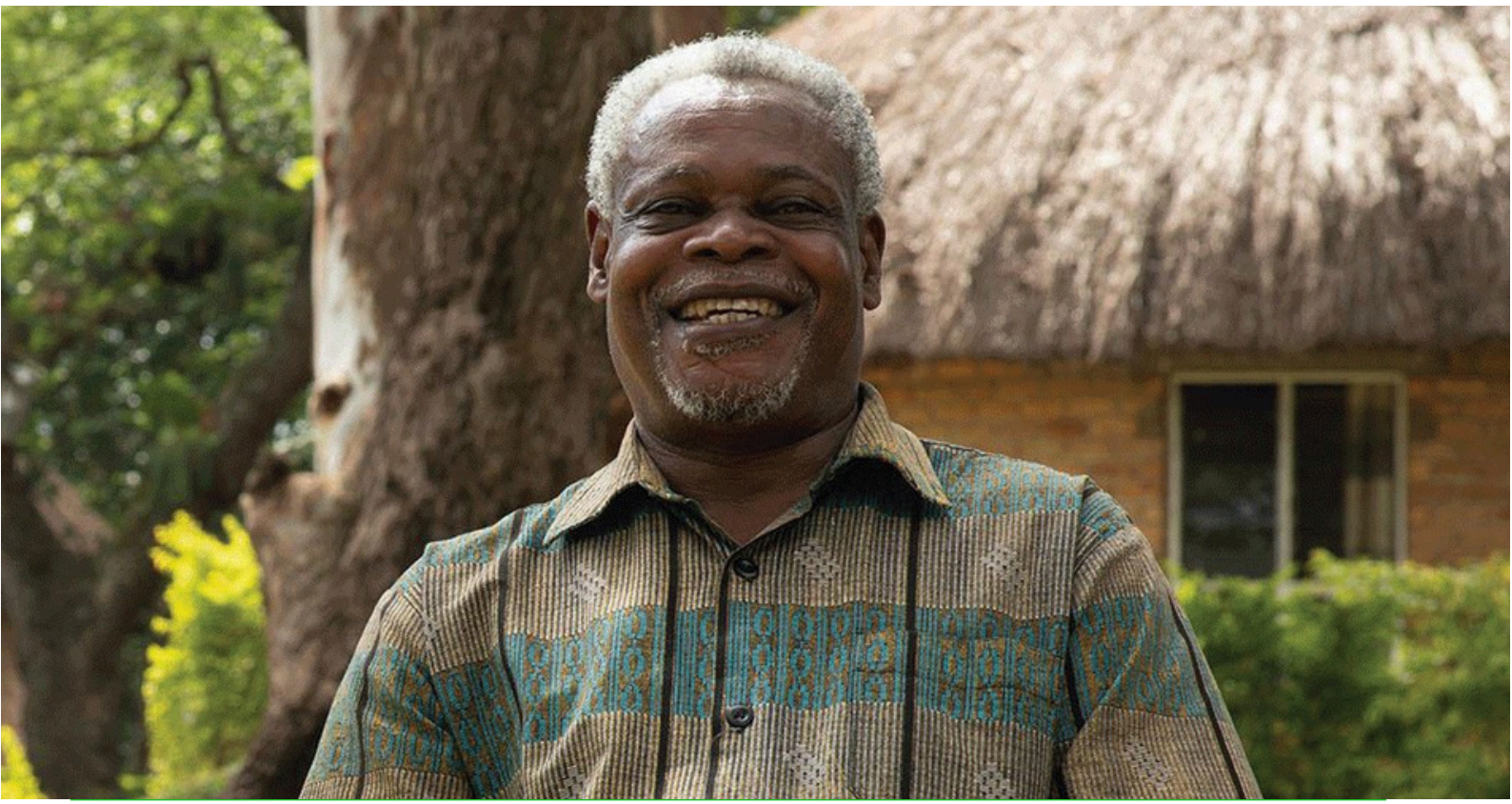


LEARNING WITH COMMUNITIES. CREATING LASTING CHANGE TOGETHER IN THE AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT.

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Welcome Message from
The Vice Chancellor, African Rural University



It is my pleasure to welcome you to this special edition of the African Rural University Community Engagement Magazine.

At ARU, community engagement is more than a university mandate, it is at the heart of how we understand education and rural transformation.

Since its inception, long before Competence-Based Education became a prominent conversation in higher education, ARU was connecting learning with real-life experience, practical application and the realities of rural communities.

Central to this work is the Visionary Approach, which enables communities to move beyond simply responding to circumstances towards creating the future they want. By envisioning a desired future, understanding their current reality and recognizing the discrepancy between the two, communities identify actions that can move them forward. Furthermore, you will see how ARU students masterfully apply the Creative Process and systems thinking through their targeted field practicums, professional internships, and rigorous Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR).

Ultimately, we invite you to discover the lasting impact of this approach where learning extends beyond the classroom to nurture student excellence, empower communities, and advance sustainable rural transformation. It is a journey that prepares capable, responsible and purpose-driven contributors to Africa's development.

We invite you to explore this journey with us.

Dr. Mwalimu Musheshe
Vice Chancellor
African Rural University

FROM THE EDITORIAL TEAM

From Learning to Lasting Transformation.



Mr. Tusiime John
Head of Community Engagement



Joseph Jones Odoi
Communication & Marketing Officer, ARU



Ayesiga Esther
BRD Student, ARU.

Dear ARU Friend,
Community engagement is a cornerstone of higher education. It creates a bridge between the university and the communities it serves, allowing knowledge, research and innovation towards achieving community aspirations.

At African Rural University, Community engagement is part of how we teach, how our students learn and how we pursue rural transformation.

In this issue, we take you into the ARU approach to community engagement, how students move beyond the classroom through practicum, Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR), internships and other community-based experiences to learn with, rather than simply about, communities.

You will discover how this approach connects with ARU's Competence-Based Education (CBET) model, and how students apply the three Masteries of the; Creative Process, Systems Thinking and Sustainable Development to understand realities, envision desired futures and turn ideas into action.

We also look at the ARU campus community as a space for learning and participation, and at the difference students are already making before graduation.
These experiences are helping shape Rural Transformation Specialists who are not only equipped with knowledge, but are able to listen, collaborate, mobilize local knowledge, connect systems and work with communities towards lasting change.

We invite you to explore these stories and discover what makes community engagement at ARU distinctive.
Happy reading.

The Editorial Team
African Rural University

TABLE OF CONTENTS

About African Rural University 1

Competence-Based Education at African Rural University..... 3

Community Engagement at African Rural University 4

Practicum 6

Community-based Participatory Action Research 9

Internship 13

Impact before graduation 16

ARU and Community Radio..... 22

The Green Campus 24

The ARU Community 26

Community Impact in numbers 30

Alumnae Impact & News 31

AFRICAN RURAL UNIVERSITY FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
Awakening the sleeping genius in each of us



ABOUT AFRICAN RURAL UNIVERSITY

"Awakening the Sleeping Genius in Each of us"

African Rural University is a value-based all Women's university- located in Kagadi District in the Bunyoro sub-region of Western Uganda, along the Kagadi-Hoima Road.

It was Founded by the Uganda Rural Development and Training Programme (URDT). ARU is committed to providing women with necessary knowledge, skills and experience to be effective change agents within the African Development Context.

ARU Graduates help people improve their lives and transform their communities.

Currently, ARU offers two programs; the Bachelor of Rural Development (BRD) and the Bachelor of Science in Sustainable Agriculture (BSSA), both of which equip students to become change agents within the African Context.

With a focus on practical learning, ARU's education model blends 60% theoretical learning with 40% field practice. Students not only study in the classroom but also engage in research and internship opportunities in rural communities.

These programs include three years of academic study and one year of hands-on research and internship experience which students live and work with local commu- nities.

The graduates of ARU are employed by URDT as Epicenter managers to catalyse rural transformation in different sub-counties in greater Kibaale and many other districts in Uganda by creating conditions for people to know that they are key to their own development using the visionary Approach.

OUR VISION

African Rural University offers a professional Discipline in Technologies for Rural Transformation and enables students, Staff and supporters to have a shared vision and purpose; ARU is an institution that has:

- Governance and Management systems that nurture and promote participatory decision making, transformational education, training and endogenous knowledge development.
- Products which include community practice, publications, public lectures, library, Rural Transformation Specialists and research methodology based on the Visionary Approach.
- Professional Board of Trustees, Council, Staff and Promoters grounded in the principles of the creative process, disciplines of a learning organiza- tion and holistic development.
- A sustainable resource base and collaborates with public, private and academic institutions, Civil Society Organizations and the donor community that share similar philosophy of empowerment of rural people for self-reliance.

WORKING PREMISES

- The people of Uganda, like the people 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.
- Therefore, ARU facilitates a process of learning to create what is truly wanted, rather than focus on solving problems.
- 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 information sharing and key and strategic components of the rural transformation programme.

OUR MISSION

African Rural University provides transformational education to create effective change agents and makers within an African development context.

ARU applies theoretical learning, innovative instruction, and field practice, so that ARU Graduates can create conditions for rural people to improve heir lives, transform their communities, awaken inherent leadership and increase their capacity for self- generating and sustainable change.

Competence-Based Education at African Rural University

An Education Model Designed For Rural Transformation

African Rural University (ARU) uses a competence-based education model that connects theory, practical experience, community engagement and reflection. The approach is designed to prepare students not only to acquire knowledge but to apply it, develop practical competencies and contribute to rural transformation. The curriculum combines 60% theory and 40% practical learning.

The learning journey begins with the Structured Planning Framework (STC), which guides students on expected learning outcomes, activities and actions. It also encourages continuous reflection on what worked, what did not, what was learned and what should happen next.

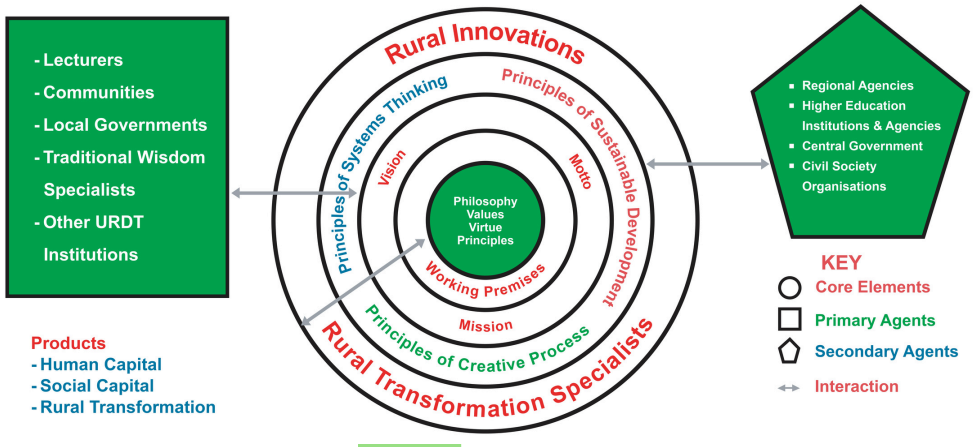


ARU's experiential learning is built around four key pillars:

1. **Classroom Learning** – Students combine academic knowledge with traditional, indigenous and local knowledge, connecting theory to real-life experiences.
2. **One-Month Village Practicum** – Students move into rural communities, live with host families, learn from community members, apply their knowledge and contribute to community initiatives. Their experiences also help generate research questions.
3. **Internship** – Students gain professional experience in organisations such as NGOs, government programmes and community development organisations while developing skills in teamwork, leadership, stakeholder engagement and project implementation.
4. **Participatory Action Research (PAR) – ARU's signature competence-based approach.** Students work alongside communities to identify priorities, conduct research, co-create solutions, implement interventions and evaluate results.

The ultimate goal is to move students beyond simply knowing towards creating the future they envision and contributing meaningfully to rural transformation.

ARU EDUCATION MODEL



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AT AFRICAN RURAL UNIVERSITY

"Transforming societies through education"



"ARU's community engagement is more than taking education into communities - it is about learning with communities, unlocking their potential, strengthening their capacity to lead change, and creating a sustainable cycle of rural transformation"

At African Rural University (ARU), community engagement is at the heart of the education model.

Guided by the Ubuntu philosophy, "I am because We are," ARU's community engagement model brings students, faculty, traditional wisdom specialists, local leaders, government, partners and rural communities into a shared process of learning and action. Communities identify their aspirations, participate in defining priorities and contribute to solutions that respond to their realities.

The result is an education that does not end at the lecture theater. It moves into homes, farms, villages, local governments and community institutions where knowledge is tested, adapted and transformed into practical action.

Learning With Communities. Creating With Communities. Transforming With Communities.

ARU's approach is rooted in the belief that rural people are key to their own development. Local knowledge, experience and resources are therefore not treated as secondary, they are essential assets in the transformation process.

Students learn to listen before acting. They learn to understand systems rather than isolated problems. They learn to work with communities to articulate a shared vision, assess current reality and design pathways towards change.



African Rural University Students facilitating the staff, students and parents of Benita High School about the visionary approach

Through practicum, Community-Based Participatory Action Research, internships, community-based projects, public lectures, exhibitions, feature days, thematic events, Foundation Course and media engagement, ARU creates multiple pathways through which knowledge moves between the university and society.

The community benefits from new knowledge, skills, research and innovation. Students gain practical experience, professional confidence and a deeper understanding of rural realities. Faculty and partners gain opportunities to generate knowledge that is grounded in lived experience.

The ultimate ambition is not simply to produce graduates who know about rural development. It is to prepare Rural Transformation Specialists visionary, creative, innovative and systems-oriented professionals equipped to work alongside communities and catalyse sustainable change.

> ***The community is not merely where ARU works. It is where ARU learns, serves, innovates and demonstrates what education can make possible.***



PRACTICUM: TURNING CLASSROOM KNOWLEDGE INTO COMMUNITY ACTION

The Village Practicum places ARU students directly within rural communities, transforming the village into a living-classroom. At the end of their second year, students spend one month immersed in community life. Hosted by families that have or had students at URDT Girls School, students work alongside households and communities while applying the visionary approach, systems thinking and participatory methods they have developed through their studies.

This is not observation from a distance.

Students live with the people, listen to their aspirations, understand their realities and work alongside them to identify opportunities for change.

Using tools such as community action planning, social mapping, resource mapping, transect walks and structural tension charts, students and communities explore where they are, where they want to go and what it will take to move forward.

The village becomes the classroom. The people become co-educators.

Each student is supported through a network of mentors including faculty, Traditional Wisdom Specialists, field mentors and members of the host family creating a learning environment that combines academic knowledge with community wisdom.

The practicum also lays the foundation for deeper engagement. Students work collaboratively with host families and communities to identify research topics that can later inform their fourth-year Community-Based Participatory Action Research.

The experience therefore becomes more than a field placement.

It is the beginning of a relationship between learner, community and transformation.

Applying the Visionary Approach for Promoting Household and Community Transformation in Nyamigisa A Village



Nanyonga Marylydia

For Nanyonga Marylydia, the Village Practicum was more than a field assignment. It was an opportunity to put the Visionary Approach into practice working alongside a rural family and community to turn aspirations into practical action.

During her one-month placement in Nyamigisa A Village, Nanyonga worked with her host family to revisit and strengthen their five-year vision: a sustainablehomestead with improved sanitation, access to water and electricity, animal shelters and income-generating activities by 2031. Together, they assessed their current reality and identified practical steps towards that future.

The vision became action.

The household improved its kitchen garden and banana and coffee plantation, established compost pits, improved waste management, and constructed a permanent Lorena energy-saving stove designed to reduce firewood use and indoor smoke.



But the impact did not stop at one household.

Working with the Nyamigisa A Women Cooperative Group, Nanyonga facilitated practical enterprise and agricultural activities. The group produced 40 litres of liquid soap, creating both a hygiene solution and an income-generating opportunity, while 100 charcoal briquettes were produced as an alternative household fuel.

She also facilitated a village meeting that brought community members together to identify and prioritise their own development challenges including water, electricity, roads and education. Rather than prescribing solutions, the process placed the community at the centre of defining its priorities.

At St. Paul Nyamigisa Primary School, the practicum extended to the next generation. Pupils participated in sanitation activities and sack gardening, gaining practical agricultural knowledge they could take home and share with their families.

A Transformation That Began Before the Practicum

Perhaps the most powerful evidence of transformation came from Nanyonga's host family.

Before their daughter Atugonza Farida joined URDT Girls School, the family lived in severe poverty, in a small grass-thatched house and without a clear long-term direction. Through URDT's education, Farida learned the Visionary Approach, sustainable farming and practical household technologies. She brought that knowledge home, where the family developed a shared vision and began changing how they farmed, saved and planned for their future.

Over time, their living conditions improved significantly

Farida went on to graduate with a Bachelor's Degree in Rural Development and become an Epicentre Manager. Today, she contributes to household income and supports the education of her siblings.

This is the power of ARU's practicum model: students do not simply enter communities to deliver knowledge. They learn with people, work alongside them and help unlock the capacity already within households and communities to create lasting change.

> ***"Transformation begins when people can see the future they want and recognise that they have the capacity to begin creating it."***





COMMUNITY-BASED PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH: Research With People, Not Just About People

At ARU, research is designed to move beyond the traditional relationship between the researcher and subject. Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR) places communities at the centre of the research process, ensuring that inquiry is connected to real aspirations, lived realities and practical opportunities for change.

In the first semester of their fourth year, students undertake CBPAR in consultation with their communities. Research concepts are developed with the host family or community and guided through the University's research structures.

The process is grounded in ARU's visionary and systems approach and participatory methods.

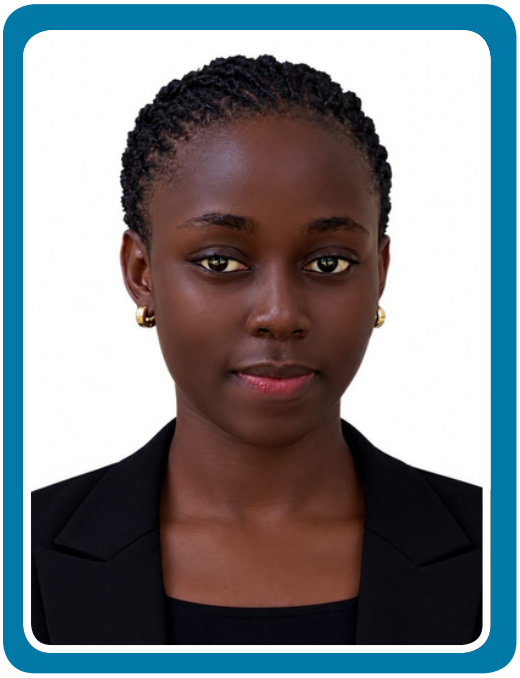
CBPAR enables students and communities to investigate issues that matter not simply to generate academic reports, but to produce knowledge that can inform action.

Research findings are shared and validated with the community and faculty, strengthening accountability and ensuring that knowledge returns to the people who helped create it.

ARU's research priorities include areas with direct community benefit, including agriculture, health, education, gender and social welfare, while researchers are expected to involve community members and share findings in accessible, actionable forms.

The result is research that listens, learns and responds.

> ***Because the most meaningful research does not simply describe change. It helps communities create it.***



Assessing Socio-Economic Factors Affecting Primary School Retention in Kidukuule Village, Kabasekende Sub-County, Kibaale District

Reseached by: Acirocan Patricia

What happens when research begins with a community's own vision and ends with evidence that can shape action?

During Community Action Planning in Kidukuule Village, residents identified a shared aspiration: a community where children stay in school, progress normally and complete Primary Seven by 2035. This community-defined priority became the foundation for Patricia Acirocan's Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPAR).

Patricia investigated the socio-economic factors affecting primary school retention, bringing together the perspectives of **151** participants from a target population of **260**. The research combined questionnaires, key-informant interviews, focus group discussions, document review and observation creating a richer picture of the realities behind school dropout.

The Key Findings.

70.9% of households reported monthly incomes below UGX 100,000.

50.3% identified lack of scholastic materials as a leading cause of dropout.

73.5% of reported dropouts occurred in Upper Primary (P.5–P.7).

69.5% reported that pupils miss school for farm work.

75.5% reported that household chores affect pupils' concentration.

The research also found a moderate positive relationship between household financial situation and school attendance showing why improving household livelihoods must be part of the solution to keeping children in school.



Sensitation on primary school retention at kabasekende primary school



Patricia training pupils at Nyamugura Primary School in Liquid soap making.

FROM FINDINGS TO ACTION

Patricia's research did not stop at identifying the real community need. It captured community-generated solutions: guidance and counselling, community sensitisation, local accountability mechanisms, economic empowerment, stronger partnerships and targeted support for vulnerable learners.

The recommendations point directly toward investment opportunities including scholastic-material support, programmes for adolescent girls, savings groups and links to livelihood initiatives such as VSLAs and PDM.

Analysing Causes of Youth Unemployment in Buhumuriro Cell Pachwa Town Council, Kagadi District

Researcher: Atuhura Monica



When communities help define the question, research becomes more than data collection, it becomes a pathway to action.

In Buhumuriro Cell, Pachwa Town Council, **Atuhura Monica** put this principle into practice, investigating the causes of youth unemployment through a research process shaped by community participation.

Her CBPAR journey began with the community and brought together 171 participants, including young people, women, men, community leaders and other stakeholders. Trained community members worked alongside her in collecting information, facilitating discussions and interpreting local realities ensuring that the research reflected the community's own experiences and perspectives.

The findings revealed a significant challenge:



85% of participants were unemployed, while only 22% reported having the ability to start a business. Participants identified barriers including limited capital, inadequate skills, limited employment opportunities and other factors affecting young people's economic participation.

But Monica's research did not end with the findings.

Through community discussions, analysis and validation, participants explored practical pathways forward such as including vocational training, youth development programmes, government and NGO support, mindset change and greater engagement in agriculture.

> ***"When communities help ask the questions, interpret the evidence and shape the response, research becomes a pathway to action."***



INTERNSHIP: TURNING KNOWLEDGE INTO EXPERIENCE

ARU's four-month internship immerses fourth-year students in the realities of rural development, placing them within sub-counties where they work under the mentorship of Epicentre Managers and Faculty staff.

Here, theory meets the systems, institutions and people that shape everyday community development.

Interns work alongside sub-county technical and political staff, applying participatory tools while contributing to community-driven projects, the Epicentre Strategy and government programmes.

The internship strengthens students' ability to navigate real development environments while building their confidence as facilitators, researchers, communicators and change agents.

It also creates a bridge between ARU and local government connecting university knowledge with existing structures, programmes and community priorities.

Students are mentored, assessed and required to reflect on their field experience, while communities and the Faculty contribute to validating their work.

The experience prepares students not simply to enter the development sector, but to work within it with purpose, professionalism and a transformation mindset.



TRANSFORMING RURAL COMMUNITIES USING THE VISIONARY APPROACH IN ISUNGA SUB-COUNTY KAGADI DISTRICT

Intern: Night Teopista

At African Rural University, internship is not simply workplace placement. It is where classroom knowledge is tested against the realities of rural development.

For Teopista, the five-month internship in Isunga Sub-county, Kagadi District, became an opportunity to work alongside local government, communities, schools and development actors to turn ARU's approaches into practical action.

From 25 April to 25 October 2024, she worked across Nyakabira and Kyakanagi villages, mentored by faculty, Epicentre leadership, local government staff and community members.

FROM KNOWLEDGE TO ACTION

Working across individual households, groups, institutions and the wider community, Teopista applied the Visionary Approach, Community Action Planning, Participatory Action Research and home-based engagement to address locally identified priorities.

Her internship connected learning with practical development priorities from livelihoods and sustainable agriculture to education, gender, health, environmental conservation, governance and community infrastructure.

MEASURABLE IMPACT

The results demonstrate that an intern can contribute far beyond personal learning.

- 20 households developed family visions and Structural Tension Charts.
- 13 new family visions were formulated, alongside four existing visions that were re-articulated.
- 7 households established kitchen gardens to improve household nutrition and reduce the cost of buying vegetables.
- 564 people pupils, teachers and community members gained skills in making herbal soap.
- 37 members of two women's groups gained skills in avocado oil value addition.
- 504 pupils + 23 teachers were oriented in the Visionary Approach across two primary schools.

SOLUTIONS BUILT FROM LOCAL RESOURCES

The internship demonstrated how practical knowledge can unlock value from resources already available within communities.

Women's groups learned to process avocado into oil. Communities explored herbal soap and indigenous medicine. Families were trained to construct energy-saving Lorena stoves, while a women's group produced charcoal briquettes from locally available materials, creating an environmentally responsible alternative to firewood and charcoal.

PDM beneficiaries were also supported to assess and select viable enterprises including piggery, poultry and coffee using criteria such as marketability, risk, profitability and land requirements.

WHEN COMMUNITIES LEAD, CHANGE MOVES

Two Community Action Planning processes brought residents together to articulate the future they wanted including safe water, better roads, educated children, food security and peaceful, secure communities.

From these shared visions came concrete action plans and household-level commitments.

The approach also helped communities take ownership of collective priorities. Residents mobilised themselves to clear an access road and clean Kakamara Protected Spring, demonstrating that community transformation does not always begin with an external project, it can begin with people recognising their own capacity to act.

One particularly striking result emerged from community security dialogues. Following concerns about theft of agricultural produce, security meetings brought together local leaders, police and community members. The report records that Kyakanagi subsequently reported only one case over a five-month period, compared with frequent reports before the intervention. The approach was subsequently adopted for wider rollout across the sub-county.

> ***"The internship is where competence becomes contribution, where students move from knowing about rural transformation to practising it."***



IMPACT BEFORE GRADUATION



Irene Tusiime's Research Spurs First Safe Water Access in Kaigulumba Village, Nalweyo Subcounty

Water is life yet not everyone has access to clean, safe water. In line with Sustainable-Development Goal 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), In 2024-2025, Irene Tusiime, a final-year Bachelor of Rural Development student at African Rural University (ARU), engaged the community of Kaigulumba Village, Nalweyo Subcounty in Kakumiro District through participatory action research on water accessibility a topic identified by the community themselves.

Guided by ARU's Visionary Approach and facilitated by Irene, community members came together to draw a shared vision for their village a vision of having clean, safe water by the year 2026. With support from the local sub-county leadership, the community translated their aspirations into action.

Today, that vision has become a reality. Two new boreholes were constructed in Kaigulumba Village.

Before, people shared water sources with animals. Now, they enjoy clean, safe borehole water.

This is one of many examples of how ARU's community engagement contributes to national development agenda and awakens people to bring to reality what they truly care about based on the following principles;

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.



From Community Research to Practical Impact: How Atugonza Doreen Turned a Local Challenge into Action



Atugonza Doreen's journey began not with a research question designed in a, classroom but with a challenge raised by the community in Kasozi Village, Kasimbi Sub-County. The community wanted to understand why children were struggling to learn and, more importantly, what could be done about it.

As an African Rural University (ARU) student researcher, Doreen worked alongside 205 community members, including students, parents, teachers and local leaders, to investigate the socio-economic factors influencing literacy.

Key Findings

The participatory research uncovered several challenges affecting children's education. Nearly seven in ten students (69.7%) lacked basic learning materials, while 39% of households faced financial constraints in supporting education.

Parental support was also limited, with 87.8% of students receiving little or no help with homework. Nutrition emerged as another major concern, with 98.5% of learners reportedly going to school without breakfast.

The research also highlighted wider socio-cultural barriers, including early marriage and gender-related challenges affecting school attendance.

From Findings to a Shared Vision

Guided by ARU's Visionary Approach, Doreen facilitated a process that enabled community members to look beyond their current challenges and define the future they wanted.

At household level, 10 families developed individual visions for improving their livelihoods. Five went on to actively revisit and implement their plans.

At community level, 76 residents of Manyinya Village developed a shared vision:increased household income through improved agricultural practices by 2028.

The process demonstrated a core principle of ARU's approach: communities are not passive beneficiaries of research, they are co-creators of knowledge and solutions.

Students Turn Ideas into Enterprise

The vision also found expression within schools.
Students at St. John Baptist Secondary School developed practical income-generating activities linked to their community priorities. These included liquid and bar soap production, charcoal briquette making and green vegetable cultivation.

Measuring Change Beyond the Classroom

The results provided tangible evidence of what can happen when research is connected to action.

Students produced 1,700 charcoal briquettes, contributing to environmental protection, while soap sales generated UGX 1.2 million, helping students meet school-related costs.

School enrolment at Kasimbi Secondary School also increased from 206 to 270 students by the second term, reflecting the broader changes taking place within the community.

Doreen's experience illustrates what makes the ARU education model distinctive.

Her research moved from a community-defined question, to evidence generation, to collective visioning and finally to practical action. The process brought together Participatory Action Research, the Visionary Approach and competence-based learning to connect university education with real community needs.







From investigating youth unemployment to influencing local development planning, Atuhura Monica was already creating change before graduation.

Atuhura Monica entered her internship with a question that affects many rural communities**: how can young people move from unemployment to meaningful economic opportunity?**

Her fieldwork in Buhumuriro and Kyakadehe Cells, Pachwa Town Council, Kagadi District, became more than an academic exercise. It became an opportunity to listen to communities, understand their priorities and translate what she learned into practical action.

Her work focused on youth unemployment a challenge linked to limited vocational skills, inadequate access to capital and few opportunities for enterprise development. Rather than stopping at identifying the problem, Monica worked alongside community members, local leaders and young people to explore solutions

FROM EVIDENCE TO ACTION

Through community assessments, dialogue and participatory planning, Monica helped communities identify the issues most affecting their livelihoods and wellbeing.

She facilitated poultry management training for **153 young people,** covering areas such as disease control, feeding, housing, record keeping and marketing. At least **three young people subsequently established poultry projects,** turning acquired knowledge into opportunities for self-employment and income generation.

She also mobilised young people towards vocational training, with some joining training in mushroom growing and painting opening pathways beyond traditional employment.

For young women, Monica facilitated entrepreneurship, leadership and financial literacy sessions reaching **68 participants**, strengthening knowledge in business management, savings, investment and enterprise development.

WHEN COMMUNITY VOICES REACHED THE PLANNING TABLE

Perhaps the most significant dimension of Monica's work was her ability to connect community priorities with local government planning.

Through participation in Council and Technical Planning Committee meetings, community engagement and advocacy, she helped advance the community's call for rehabilitation of the **Kyakadehe–Kibengo road**, which was incorporated into the Town Council development plan.

Her participatory needs assessments also helped surface priorities around water, infrastructure and livelihoods, contributing to the inclusion of a borehole in the development plan and other community development interventions.

This was research becoming more than a report.

It became a bridge between community voices and development decisions.

IMPACT THAT STARTED WITH PARTICIPATION

Monica's approach was rooted in a simple principle: sustainable development is stronger when communities are not merely beneficiaries, but active participants in defining their needs and envisioning the future they want.

Through Community Action Planning and community dialogue, residents identified priorities including clean water, roads, education and livelihoods. She mobilised **86 community members** to renovate and protect Kyakadehe Spring, improving access to safer water while strengthening collective ownership of a shared resource.

She also supported the formation of **three community groups**, creating platforms for savings, enterprise development, vocational training and mutual support.

Monica's experience captures what happens when research, practical learning and community engagement meet.

Before completing her Bachelor of Rural Development, she had already helped young people explore livelihood opportunities, strengthened women's economic participation, facilitated community planning and helped bring local priorities into government development planning.

Monica went into the community as a student conducting fieldwork.

She left having already demonstrated what a change agent can do.





ARU AND COMMUNITY RADIO

"Giving Rural Communities a Voice"



What if a university could take its classroom to millions of people?
Through Kagadi-Kibaale Community Radio (KKCR), African Rural University extends beyond the campus.

The radio serves as a living bridge between knowledge and community action, connecting students, researchers, local leaders and citizens in conversations that matter.
ARU students and faculty use the airwaves to share knowledge, discuss community issues, disseminate research, promote rural innovations and amplify indigenous knowledge.

Programmes on sustainable agriculture, health, gender equality, rural development and visionary leadership turn academic learning into conversations that communities can listen to, question and apply.
But the flow is not one-way. Communities also speak, question, contribute their knowledge and shape the conversation. Through interactive programmes, ARU learns from the people it serves, strengthening the connection between research, education and lived experience.

In this way, KKCR is more than a radio station. It is a classroom without walls, a platform for dialogue, and a pathway through which ideas travel from the university to communities, and community wisdom travels back to the university.

Inside an ARU Community Radio Programme



By Musiimenta Noeline
BRD Student, African Rural University

"Through KKC radio, I have found more than a platform to speak, I have found my voice as a leader."

The radio has strengthened my confidence, communication and leadership skills, while connecting what I learn in class with the realities of rural communities.
Through our programmes and talk shows, listeners ask questions, share experiences and explore new ideas. I have seen these conversations inspire visionary thinking, improved livelihoods, greater attention to education, and stronger conversations around health, gender, peace and cooperation.
For me, radio is where learning meets community engagement, and where a student's voice can help open new possibilities for others.



THE GREEN CAMPUS: LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

At ARU, sustainability is not simply taught. It is lived, explored and practised- turning the campus into a living laboratory where students learn from nature, communities and indigenous wisdom as they envision the futures they want to create.

Students put knowledge into practice through sustainable agriculture and hands-on learning. The campus provides space to explore how land, food systems and natural resources can contribute to healthier communities and resilient livelihoods.

The Green Campus encourages students to understand and value biodiversity, indigenous plants, seeds and natural resources. Conservation becomes more than a concept, it becomes something students can observe, practise and carry forward.

LEARN FROM WISDOM

Knowledge does not exist only in textbooks.
Through engagement with Traditional Wisdom Specialists (TWS), students encounter generations of indigenous knowledge about plants, seeds, food, medicine, farming and stewardship of natural resources.
This creates opportunities to connect indigenous wisdom with contemporary learning, reflection and innovation.

EXPERIMENT & INNOVATE

The campus becomes a space for demonstration, experimentation and discovery.
Students can test ideas, learn from what works and what does not, and explore possibilities that respond to the realities of rural communities.
This is learning with purpose, where knowledge is continually connected to action.

The ultimate outcome is not simply a student who knows about sustainability.
It is a graduate who has developed the confidence, practical experience and imagination to create possibilities.

"The ARU campus is not only a place to study sustainability. It is a place to practise it, and to learn from the wisdom that communities have carried for generations."



Students in a hands-on pratical session at the green house



THE ARU COMMUNITY: A Campus Connected to the Society

African Rural University lives as one community where the university and society learn, create and grow together.

ARU is built on the understanding that transformation begins with a vision of the desired future, an understanding of current reality, and deliberate action to create that future.

The ARU community extends beyond the campus, bringing together students, staff, Traditional Wisdom Specialists, host families, alumni, URDT, villages and nature as part of one learning and transformation ecosystem.

At ARU, learning moves between the classroom, village, field and market. This connection is not an occasional activity, it is part of how the university is designed.

Living in Harmony with Nature

At ARU, nature is part of the university experience.

The university is set within a forested environment where students learn, walk and live alongside indigenous trees and wildlife, including monkeys such as calabash monkeys. The natural surroundings create a distinctive setting where learning extends beyond buildings and classrooms.

The campus provides a living environment for agroforestry, sustainable agriculture, biodiversity and conservation, while its natural and rural character creates opportunities to connect learning, culture, nature and tourism.



Community Learning

Knowledge flows both ways. Traditional Wisdom Specialists, elders and custodians of indigenous knowledge contribute to teaching, mentoring and curriculum development. Community members are co-teachers and co-researchers.

The Community Library and daily foundation courses further create spaces for learning, reflection and exchange.

Community Events.

The campus brings culture, knowledge and enterprise together through Indigenous Food Exhibitions guided by Traditional-Wisdom Specialists, Epicentre Exhibitions with URDT showcasing artisan crafts, and reflection sessions on visionary leadership.

Innovation and Enterprise

ARU creates space for ideas to move from possibility to practice. Students and communities explore appropriate technologies, time-saving innovations, sustainable agriculture enterprises and opportunities to transform local and upcycled materials into businesses.

Student-Led Activities

Students are active members of the wider community through peer learning, summer schools, financial literacy sessions and community dialogues. The PROWIBO Summer School and UNESCO Chair Summer School provide platforms for students to learn, lead and collaborate.



Leading the Change: Restoring Soil and Earning with Vermicompost

Peninah Akampurira, ARU BSSA Student

One of the students making a difference is Peninah Akampurira. Right now, she is actively working on creating and using vermicompost to restore soil health, improve crop production, and generate income by selling it to farmers.

Peninah's journey started with learning how to set practical goals using the visionary approach, which begins with knowing what you want to create.

She envisioned developing a sustainable vermicompost system for farming, then took action with clear deadlines to bring her vision to life.

“This is more than just composting; it is about creating a vision for the future,” says Peninah. “Through the Learn, Work, and Earn model, I was to kickstart my vermicompost project with 1 vermi structure in November 2024.



Now I have 4 structures and through this practical model, iam learning every day, gaining skill but also but also contributing to social, economic and environmental nourishment. In essence, iam contributing to soil health to cause a multiplier effect hence holistic development.

From Student to Rural Innovator: Christine's PROWIBO experience

Kyatusimire Christine, ARU BSSA student



PROWIBO changed how I see myself and my community. I learned that tourism is not only about national parks and wildlife but aslo our culture, food, farming, stories and landscapes are tourism assets too.

But the biggest transformation for me came through AI in agriculture. Through hands-on training in AI for agriculture, I used an intelligent soil-testing tool on our own plots. I discovered that AI is not just for the developed world; it can empower rural farmers to make smarter decisions, reduce costs and improve yields.

Today, I see myself not just as a student, but as an innovator and community tourism ambassador. I have practical skills I can take to farmers in my community, while our ARU plots serve as living laboratories for innovation.

Most importantly, the experience strengthened my confidence as a young woman in technology and tourism entrepreneurship. It connected us to global knowledge while showing us how to apply that knowledge locally.

"Our rural communities are rich. We do not need to look far, we already have tourism and agricultural gold in our hands."



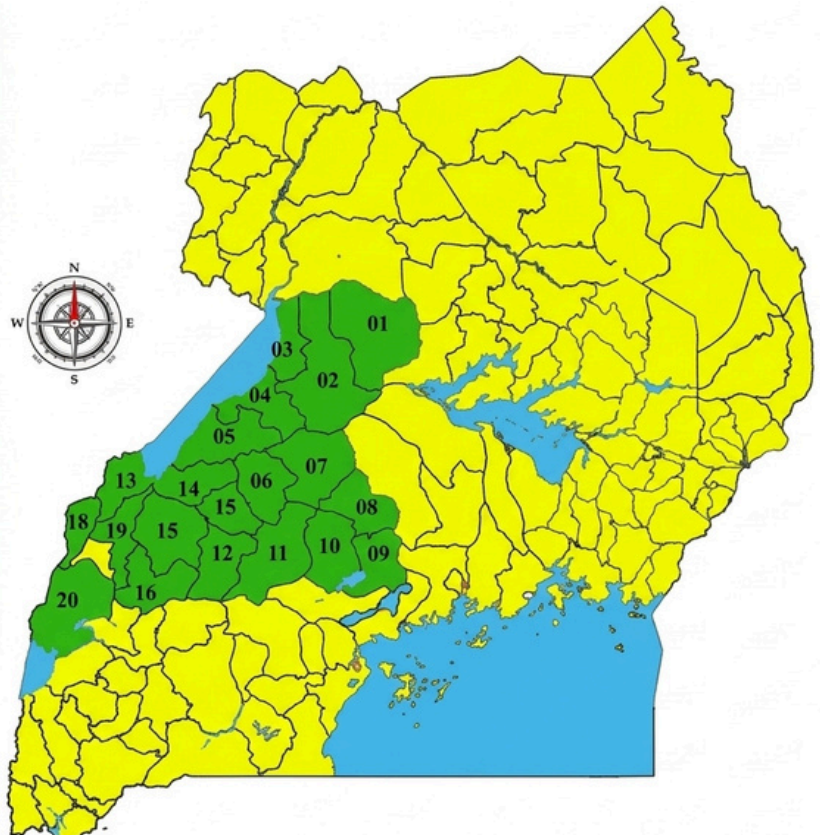
Christine using AI-powered soil testing to make smarter decisions for the farm.

Real Impact, Real Number

In 2025, ARU's education was recognised for excellence in community engagement, standing among the world's leading universities in this area. Its ripple effect now extends across **20+ districts** and **four refugee settlements** in Uganda, with graduates driving community development across **36 sub-counties** in Kagadi, Kakumiro and Kibaale.

The impact is growing:

100+ community-based participatory action research projects conducted **100,000+ rural visions** developed and acted upon **5+ million people** reached monthly through community-based radio programming **70,000+ young people trained** through the Learn, Earn and Work model **2 boreholes** constructed in Kaigumba Village following student-led research during a seven-month field attachment



District	Outreach
01 - Kiryandongo District	2,821 (1,523F)
02 - Masindi District	2,080 (1,453F)
03 - Buliisa District	2,506 (1,605F)
04 - Hoima District	1,314 (878F)
05 - Kikuube District	2,302 (1,620F)
06 - Kakumiro District	3,121 (1,924F)
07 - Kyankwanzi	2,105 (1,201F)
08 - Kiboga District	4,104 (2,680F)
09 - Mityana District	2,103 (1,492F)
10 - Kassanda District	3,124 (2,053F)
11 - Mubende District	910 (693F)
12 - Kyegegwa District	2,370 (1,464F)
13 - Kibaale District	2,778 (1,848F)
14 - Kagadi District	5,770 (3,899F)
15 - Kyenjojo District	2,488 (1,451F)
16 - Kamwenge District	4,384 (2,680F)
17 - Ntoroko District	3,089 (1,963F)
18 - Bundibugyo District	3,103 (2,150F)
19 - Kabarole District	2,843 (1,550F)
20 - Kasese District	3,082 (1,907F)

Refugee Settlements	Outreach
01 - RS Kiryandongo	3,482 (2,537F)
05 - RS Kyangwali	4,397 (2,801F)
12 - RS Kyaka II	4,220 (2,842F)
16 - RS Rwamwanja	1,605 (1,107F)

Transformation work is already bearing fruit. Villages are turning into organized, visionary communities. Families are becoming self-reliant. Institutions are becoming centers of innovation. And this is just the beginning.

ALUMNAE & NEWS

ALUMNAE IMPACT

Ms.Nampewo Josephine



My journey as an alumna of African Rural University (ARU) has taught me that sustainable transformation begins when people recognise their potential, share a vision and work together to turn their aspirations into reality.

At the household level, I have shared the Visionary Approach with my parents, contributing to our family vision. Together, we have constructed a commercial house generating **UGX 300,000** in monthly income, established two acres of coffee and two acres of banana plantations, and earned **UGX 2.1 million** per season from land hire.

My community engagement in Kabarole District has further demonstrated the power of collective action. Through the 70-member Mugusu Environmental and Social Committee, I have witnessed how organised communities can improve livelihoods, with the group mobilising approximately **UGX 40 million** in annual savings.

I have also been part of a skilling initiative that equipped **650 young people** with knowledge of the Visionary Approach and entrepreneurship skills, encouraging them to recognise their potential, set goals and explore entrepreneurial opportunities.

These experiences have strengthened my conviction that meaningful community engagement involves enabling people to participate actively in their own development. Whether at home, within organised community groups or among young people, a shared vision combined with practical action can create lasting change.

"***For me, the true value of the Visionary Approach lies in turning a shared vision into practical, measurable change that improves people's lives.***"

From Learning with Communities to Leading for Transformation



ALUMNAE IMPACT

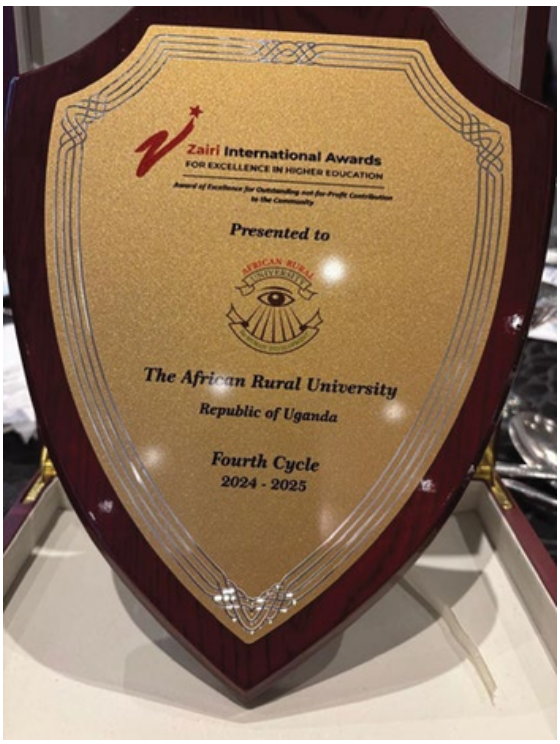
Ms. Namutosi Doloka

My journey with African Rural University (ARU) began in 2012 when I enrolled for a Bachelor's Degree in Rural Development. I joined ARU expecting to acquire academic knowledge and prepare for a career. Instead, I encountered an education that connected classroom learning with the realities of rural communities and fundamentally shaped my understanding of leadership and development.

Through my practicum and internship experiences in Ruteete, Burora and Kyebando, I worked alongside families, women, youth, schools and local leaders. I participated in sanitation initiatives, community action planning, resource mobilization, savings and credit groups, school farming, adult literacy, environmental conservation and household income-generating activities. These experiences taught me that sustainable transformation is strongest when communities participate in articulating their visions based on their aspirations, assessing their current realities, generating structural tension for action taking and ensuring ownership of change.

My journey reflects ARU's transformative approach to education: from learning with communities, to serving communities, and ultimately to strengthening institutions that support transformation. ARU gave me more than a degree. It gave me a foundation for purposeful leadership and a lifelong commitment to service.





ARU Wins Global Award of Excellence for Outstanding Non-Profit Contribu- tion to the Community

African Rural University emerged victorious at the 4th cycle of the Zari International Awards for Excellence in Higher Education (2024–2025), receiving the Award of Excellence for Outstanding Non-Profit Contribution to the Community.

ARU's Vice Chancellor, Dr. Mwalimu Musheshe, received the award on October 1, 2025 in Dubai

This recognition comes after a highly competitive selection process involving applications from higher education institutions across 34 countries. ARU stood out for its innovative approach to rural development, communi- ty empowerment, and transformative edu- cation, earning a spot among the top insti- tutions worldwide.



ARU council members and staff during annual reflection, 2026



PROWIBO Participants using an AI platform known as Intelligent Soil to study soil nutrient levels and soil composition at the ARU demonstration gardens.



ARU students using AI-powered soil testing to make smarter decisions for the farm.



Group photo of farmer family learning group in Kagadi Subcounty



ARU BRD students making organic fertilizer



African Rural University Council Members



ARU students learning how to make shopping bags from old cement bags during PROWIBO sessions



ARU student BSSA Year 2 with her at her host family



A group photo during Community Action Planning



A group photo of staff, students parents, and ARU students at St. Benita High School, Kakumiro District.



ARU guild President, Akamputira Peninah shines at MOI University International Conference in Kenya

Awakening the sleeping genius in each of us

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