



MY LEADERSHIP JOURNEY TOWARD FOUNDING THE MARU ACTION DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION.



1. Roots in the Mountains: Growing Up in Kasese.

Born May 5th 1992, my name is **Fred Marule**, and my story begins in the lush, yet often harsh, landscapes of **Ihandiro Sub-county** in **Bukonzo West Constituency**, nestled within the **Rwenzori Mountains** of Kasese District, Western Uganda. I am the third child in a family of eight, raised by hardworking peasant farmers who never got the chance to finish primary school. I am birthed to **Mr. Kule Peter Kasigamutwe & Masika Grace**, who are currently in their early 60's residing at our ancestral home in Buahthiro, Ihandiro Sub County. Our life was built around subsistence agriculture, surviving from season to season on what we could grow—mostly coffee, bananas, cassava, maize and beans- sometimes cotton too.

Our home was humble. We had no electricity or running water, and access to healthcare and education was limited- to date my ancestral community has no access to electricity. Despite these challenges, my parents raised us with deep values—honesty, humility, respect for others, and the importance of working with your hands. Though materially poor, we were rich in love and cultural heritage.

Education, however, was a constant struggle. School fees were a burden too heavy for my family. I recall walking long distances barefoot to school, often on an empty stomach. My uniform was patched, my books shared with others, and I sometimes missed exams because my parents couldn't raise the exam fees in time. Yet, I was determined to learn. I knew deep within me that **education was the only bridge** that could help me cross from poverty into possibility.

2. Early Education and the Power of Belief.

I attended **Ihandiro Vocational Secondary School** located in Kihoko, Ihandiro Sub County, Bukozo West Constituency, and Kasese District, where I began to discover my gifts—especially in public speaking, leadership, and community service. In 2010, I became the **Information and Entertainment Prefect** in Senior Two, a role that allowed me to read news bulletins, organize student events, and mobilize fellow students. Later on, as the **Head Prefect**, 2011.

In 2010, during a political campaign in Buhathiro Parish, my home community, I had the opportunity to read the news bulletin at a rally for **Mrs. Lucy Biira Kabanyoro**, a candidate then running for Woman Member of Parliament for Bukonzo West Constituency. My confidence caught her attention. She later asked to meet me and offered to support my education. That moment was nothing short of life-changing. With her support, I no longer worried about missing classes due to fees or lack of materials. She became my second mother, and her belief in me planted a seed of responsibility and purpose.

In 2012, I completed Senior Four with a Division 2, a moment that validated my struggle. But I didn't stop there. I then moved from my home village and stayed with Sister **Ellen Asimwe**, daughter to **Mrs. Lucy** my second mother in the Kasese Municipality's main Town in a place called Kilembe Quarters. It was more than home, as I was always treated as part of the family even when biologically not. **Mr. Alex Masereka**, **Ellen's** husband (I called him Mzee, simply because I respected him) was always proud of me being a part of the family. He equally supported me beyond being his brother-in-law from her wife's side.

3. Technical Skills and Becoming a Community Leader.

In 2013, I enrolled at **Kasese Youth Polytechnic**, a government aided and public technical institution located in Rukoki adjacent to the Kasese District headquarters to pursue a **Certificate in Electrical Installation Systems and Maintenance**, later upgrading to an **Advanced Certificate** at **Kyamuhunga Technical Institute** in Bushenyi district. My mother **Lucy** and Sister **Asimwe Ellen** together with her husband **Mr. Alex Masereka** who is currently serving as the Kasese District Principal Planner, still stood right by my side paying for my tuition and every other need while at school, I will always appreciate and pray for them for their kindness and generosity towards me. This technical training gave me valuable skills that made me employable, self-reliant, and confident. I could wire homes, install solar systems, and help local communities improve their energy access.

But my technical skills didn't diminish my calling to serve. I continued volunteering with the **Uganda Red Cross Society - Kasese Branch** which I had joined in 2013 as a member during the time studying at **Kasese Youth Polytechnic**, where I was deeply involved in disaster response, first aid, blood donations, WASH activities, community health, and youth engagement.

I rose to the position of **Branch Youth Council (BYC) Chairperson**, serving for two terms that is to say 2014-16 and 2016-18, under **Ms. Primrose Natukunda** as the then Branch Manager. With her strategic guidance and other senior teams, I helped organize community cleanups, emergency response campaigns, and health outreaches. This supportive working environment extended even during **Mr. Ronald Kanyerezi**, who is still serving as the current Branch Manager. This experience grounded me in what it means to serve with humanity, neutrality, and impartiality—values that have become pillars in my leadership journey.

4. A Night That Changed Everything: The 2020 Flood Disaster.

The night of **May 21, 2020**, is etched in my memory forever.

Relentless rains battered Kasese, and the usually calm rivers—**Nyamwamba, Mubuku, Lhubiriha, Rwembyo, and Nyamugasani**—overflowed with violent floods. Homes were submerged. Bridges collapsed. Roads vanished. People screamed in the wee hours of the night up to the morning hours as water swept away entire neighborhoods. **At least 11 lives were lost, and over 10,000 people displaced.**

I was working with **Kilembe Mines Limited** at the time, at the hydroelectric power plant in Ibanda, Ibanda-Kyanya Town Council, Busongora North Constituency. The plant's weir and the water canal was destroyed by floods and landslides. So was **Kilembe Mines Hospital, Bulembia Primary School, Bikone Primary School** and other key community infrastructure. My heart broke seeing my community- the entire Kasese in ruins.

But I had a choice: to mourn or to act. And I chose action.

5. From Volunteer to Visionary: A New Beginning.

With no funding, no structure, and just a burning desire to help, I began mobilizing friends, peers, and former schoolmates. I used my voice and phone to call for donations—food, clothes, soap, money. People responded. We bought essentials and went to the displaced camps families affected but staying outside camps to deliver what we could. We listened to people's stories, offered psychosocial support, and simply stood in solidarity with the affected families.

That moment made me realize: **there's a gap that formal structures often miss—local, grassroots, immediate response rooted in the lived experiences of affected people.** I wanted to create something sustainable, youth-led, and homegrown. Something that doesn't wait for foreign aid or national approvals but empowers communities to solve their own problems.

That dream led to the birth of the **Maru Action Development Foundation**, also known as the **Maru Foundation**.

6. Birth of Maru Action Development Foundation.

In **August 2020**, I called together a few passionate young men and women. We sat under a mango tree and shared ideas on how we could create an organization that would be rooted in local realities, responsive to climate disasters, and driven by community needs.

That meeting birthed **Maru Action Development Foundation**—named after my surname “Marule” but symbolically representing “Rising” or “Taking Action.”

Our vision:

“Just and climate-resilient communities that proactively respond to their own needs.”

Our mission:

“To co-create and implement inclusive community-led innovations by promoting sustainable and environmentally friendly initiatives that improve the living standards and livelihoods of women, youths, and children.”

From the start, we focused on working in flood- and landslide-affected areas such as **Ibanda-Kyanya, Kilembe, and Ihandiro**, engaging in tree planting, community education, disaster preparedness, and support for women and youth-led livelihoods.

7. Our Thematic Areas and Approach.

We work across **five thematic areas**, each deeply rooted in community needs:

1. **Environmental Conservation and Climate Response**
 - Tree planting, agroforestry, sustainable land use, sustainable waste management
 - Climate education, women and youth climate cafés, and ecosystem restoration
 - Community-based early warning systems
 - Emergency preparedness, response and psychosocial support
2. **Skills Empowerment, Mentorship, and Livelihood Programs.**
 - Skills-based training, entrepreneurship, eco-friendly innovations
 - Technical support for school dropouts, youth including those with disabilities, and vulnerable women
 - Scholastic support, safe learning spaces
 - Supporting orphans and vulnerable children in displaced communities
3. **Promoting Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Practices.**
 - WASH campaigns, menstrual hygiene education, mental health support
 - Health outreach for flood-prone and marginalized areas
4. **Climate Justice Agribusiness.**
 - Promoting urban farming practices.
 - Promoting climate-smart and organic farming practices among local farmers.
 - Promoting backyard and nutritional vegetable and fruit gardening

- Supporting vulnerable farmer- households with agricultural tools and seeds.

Our approach is **inclusive, locally-led, gender-responsive**, and centered on **youth leadership** and community participation.

8. Recognition and Growth.

In **August 2022**, we were formally registered with **Kasese Municipality** as a **Community-Based Organization (CBO)**. A year later, we expanded our registration to **Kasese District**, opening doors to collaboration with government departments, units and other stakeholders.

Since our inception, we've impacted **over 20,000 people** through various initiatives benefiting them both directly and indirectly. I am happy to walk, delivering the foundation's programs activities with the most dedicated and passionate team of 10 volunteer staff, 4 females and 6 males. These include; **Mr. Enos, Mr. Lawrence, Ms. Ronet, Mr. Kenneth, Ms. Edreen, Ms. Christine, Mr. Stephen, Mr. Godwin, Mr. Wilbert & Ms. Peace.**

9. Personal Growth, Mentorship, and Advocacy.

As I've grown, I've also been privileged to contribute to national and international conversations. I am an alumnus of **IFRC Limitless Innovation 2020** and a **Judge 2024/2025** through Uganda Red Cross Society as a Volunteer, more so a **Youth Advisory Board Member** at **Force of Nature**, and have served as a **Green-Preneurship Pitch Event Judge** for **Girls for Climate Action Uganda**, a **Force of Nature Youth Advisory Board Member** among others to mention but a few. I have also been invited to speak on **SDG platforms**, environmental panels, and youth dialogues.

But my greatest achievement remains being present for my community, building a local organization that is locally rooted, listens and acts, and mentoring the next generation of youth and women leaders.

10. The Road Ahead: Hope, Resilience, and Regeneration.

I believe that solutions to climate, livelihood, and health challenges must come from the people most affected, and right from the grassroots. That is why Maru Action Development Foundation continues to co-create solutions with community members, youth, women, and children including those with disabilities placed at the center of these discussions and actions.

We are now working on:

- **Climate Café Jazz events** to blend cultural resilience and experiences with climate education, informing local climate initiatives.
- **Regenerative farming and eco-tourism initiatives** to promote sustainable farming practices, ecosystems health, and economic recovery.

- **Tree planting campaigns** in restoration of degraded land, while promoting ecosystems resilience and livelihoods enhancement.
- **Skills-based hub and tool access** for youth and women-led enterprises to overcome unemployment and promote social-economic empowerment.

Our journey is just beginning. And though we may be small in resources, we are limitless in purpose. Perhaps you could decide joining us!

This is my story. But more importantly, it's the story of **a people rising from disaster into dignity**, one idea, one act, and one community at a time.

11. A Seat at the Table: The Turning Point with Mr. Baluku Isaya of YAGANET.

Every journey has a defining moment—an encounter that lights the path forward when you're standing in the dark, unsure of the next step. For me, that moment came in **August 2022**, during an engagement event held at a hotel in **Kasese Town**, Kasese Municipality by an organization championing disability rights and advocacy in disaster risk reduction interventions.

Among the attendees was **Mr. Baluku Isaya**, the visionary **Executive Director of Young Agro-Green Africa Network (YAGANET)**—a respected voice in the local and national development space, known for nurturing grassroots leadership, youth-led innovations, and climate-smart solutions.

I remember our first conversation clearly. It began with a mutual appreciation of each other's passion and grassroots hustle. We found ourselves exchanging words of gratitude and vision, admiring the courage it takes to build something from nothing. I told him about **Maru Action Development Foundation**—our work with no formal office, no paid staff, and no guaranteed funding—but a bold mission and resilient community spirit.

To my surprise, **Mr. Isaya** didn't hesitate. He simply said, "**Fred**, come work from my office. There's space, and you're always welcome at the table."

That wasn't just a gesture of goodwill. It was a **game-changer**.

He offered me a **seat, a desk, and a safe space** to grow the dream of Maru Foundation within his own operational office. More than that, he extended **mentorship freely**, guiding me on organizational leadership, strategic partnerships, grant writing, and networking. With his wisdom, I learned how to **think systemically, plan sustainably, and lead boldly**, even when the odds are stacked against you.

I had no formal contribution to offer him in return—only gratitude, humility, and hard work, which we all shared. And that was enough for him.

To this day, **Isaya and I are proud partners**—collaborating to support grassroots-driven solutions and empowering not only young people but also women to become agents of change staring from within their own communities.

12. A Space of Our Own: Establishing Our First Office.

By **early 2024**, after months of operating from a friend's place and public community spaces, I together with a dedicated Maru Action Development Foundation team took another bold step. With collective effort, dedication, and a bit of resource mobilization, we managed to **rent our own office space** in the heart of Kasese Town, Kasese Municipality.

Today, **Maru Action Development Foundation** is physically located at:

1st Room - 2nd Building Opposite Centenary Bank, Portal Road off to Rwenzori Square, Central Division, Kasese Municipality, Kasese District, Western Uganda.

This space is more than just an office. It is a **hub of hope**—where youth and aspiring leaders gather, ideas take shape, women and girls seek support, and projects are born.

Here, we hold coordination meetings, write proposals, host volunteers, store our climate action tools (tree seeds, vegetable seeds, jerricans, gloves, hoes, megaphones, fm radios, seeds, pangas, watering cans among others), and welcome partners. It has become a **symbol of possibility**—that even from humble beginnings, a community-driven movement can rise.

This transition from **borrowed tables to our own home base** marks a powerful milestone in our growth and resilience. And we know it's just the beginning.

13. The Power of Local Partnerships and Movement-Building.

Our story is not one of individual brilliance but of **collective resilience**. Every milestone has been fueled by **partnerships**, mentorship, and community solidarity.

From the days of working from the **YAGANET office** to renting our own, we've never walked alone. Organizations and individuals like:

- **Young Agro-Green Africa Network (YAGANET)**
- **The Movement for Community-led Development (MCLD) Uganda.**
- **Eco Youth and Women Empowerment Foundation (EYWEF)**
- **Uganda Red Cross Society - Kasese Branch**
- **Lush Charity Pot and Lush Charitable Giving**
- **Force of Nature.**
- **Inspire Girls Focus Foundation (IGFF).**
- **Polar Bears Hope.**
- **Global Waste Cleaning Network (GWCN).**
- **Hope Beyond Boundaries Elderly Foundation.**
- **The Pollination Project.**
- **Our Kids' Climate.**
- **Umverteilen Stiftung!**
- **Wild Wonder Foundation.**
- **Good Salt Foundation Uganda (GOSAFO-UG).**
- **Local leadership of Kasese District and the Kasese Municipal Council.**
- **Ms. Baroness Catherine Jade Olusoga.**

- **Ms. Judith Callaghan.**
- **Ms. Marie A Coz.**
- **M & A Reynolds.**
- **Mr. Arie Stolar.**
- **Mr. Kanyerezi Ronald.**
- **Ms. Lynette Kiiza.**
- **Ms. Sharon Nambakire.**
- **Ms. Melody Lee Lacy.**
- **Mr. Lewis Edwards.**
- **Ms. Pam Jacobs.**
- **Mr. Benard Awuko.**

...just to mention but a few have stood beside us, offered financial support, contributed tools, offered spaces, volunteered their time, and co-implemented projects to make our collective impact greater.

These partnerships prove a powerful truth: **no one is too small to make a difference, and no act of support is ever wasted.**

14. Reflections: Lessons from the Journey So Far.

Looking back, I've come to understand that leadership is not about titles or resources—it's about **showing up**, again and again, for your people.

From growing up in a remote farming village to representing displaced women and young people during disasters, from wiring homes to coordinating climate cafés for climate action, from sitting on a borrowed chair in someone else's office to establishing a home for a movement—this journey has taught me three core lessons:

1. **Start with what you have** – No funding? Start with your voice, your community, your courage. The rest follows.
2. **Relationships build revolutions** – Invest in people, not just projects. Collaboration multiplies impact.
3. **Lead with humanity** – Service, compassion, transparency and humility are what sustain true leadership.

15. The Road Ahead: Regenerating People and Planet Together.

The future for **Maru Action Development Foundation** is bold, intersectional, and driven by purpose. With climate change, poverty, hunger, youth unemployment, and displacement threatening our communities, our work is more urgent than ever.

We envision:

- Establishing a **community resilience, and mental health building centre** where young people, women, and disaster survivors can learn, connect, and heal.

- Launching a **green enterprise hub** for climate-smart and skills-based innovations, permaculture, digital space, and agro-ecology practices.
- Scaling our “**Climate Café Jazz**” spaces—blending music, culture, and storytelling to mobilize intergenerational climate action involving diverse community groups.
- Growing our **regenerative eco-tourism efforts**, tree planting campaigns, regenerative farming practices, women and youth-led reforestation programs, among others.
- Strengthening community-driven **disaster preparedness and trauma recovery programs**.

And through it all, we will keep our values close:

Rooted in community. Powered by youth and women. Guided by resilience.

16. Final Words: A Movement Built on Faith, Friendship, and Fierce Hope.

When I reflect on where we started—from a boy in the mountainous Buhathiro of Ihandiro Sub County with patched school uniforms and dreams bigger than his pocket—to now leading a grassroots organization with real impact—I am humbled.

This journey would not be possible without the **faith of people like my mother Mrs. Lucy, Mr. Isaya**, the solidarity of our individual and organizational partners, the courage of our volunteers, the in-kind and financial support of our friends and partners, the strategic guidance and financial support of our board, and the relentless hope of the communities we serve.

Maru Action Development Foundation is not just mine. It belongs to every young person who believes they can rise. Every woman who refuses to give up. Every elder who plants a tree knowing they may never sit under its shade nor harvesting its fruits.

We are **just getting started**—and we welcome all who believe in people, planet, and possibility to walk with us.

Fred Marule



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The End.