Human Rights Conversations Across Generations
Alice Achan episode
Transcript of edited conversation
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MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 0:04
Hi, welcome to our podcast, Human Rights, Conversations Across Generations. I'm Meredith Lockwood, founder of Lockwood Creative, a purpose-driven creative agency. And I'm here with my dad.

BERT LOCKWOOD 0:16
And I'm Professor Bert Lockwood, the director of the Urban Morgan Institute for Human Rights at the University of Cincinnati College of Law.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 0:26
Together, we are your father-daughter co-hosts.

BERT LOCKWOOD 0:29
For over 50 years, I've had a front-row seat to the evolution of international human rights.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 0:35
And now, we're sharing that expertise with you by connecting to the powerful stories and insights of human rights voices from around the world.

BERT LOCKWOOD 0:43
We bridge the past and the present, making complex human rights issues more approachable and understandable.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 0:50
So, pull up a chair and join our table as we speak with Nobel Peace Prize recipients, political leaders and the world's leading human rights scholars and activists.

Track 8 1:03
Today, my dad and I are joined by Alice Achan, founder of the Te-Kworo Foundation in northern Uganda.

BERT LOCKWOOD 1:10
Alice grew up during decades of conflict in northern Uganda, where the Lord's Resistance Army devastated communities and abducted thousands of children. Her own life was shaped by war, but also by her father's unwavering belief in the power of education. Our paths to Alice first crossed through our previous guest and longtime friend, Professor Eric Stover.

Track 8 1:37

Te-Kworo has educated more than 4,000 girls and supports more than 1,000 students across three campuses. Its work has expanded to maternal and child health care, mobile clinics, and the newly opened 42-bed Sonic Kworo Hospital.

BERT LOCKWOOD 1:53
Now, l welcome Alice to the show.

Alice, I wanted take you back, Something I indicated your father believed in you're getting an education.

that not typical. Is that correct?

ALICE ACHAN 2:12
Yes. And you know why? That was after. You know, my father was very wealthy. He had a lot of cows. He had a lot of cattles. And because he believed so much that many beautiful girls, when married, they bring wealth. But then when war broke in my community, he lost everything. Every wealth is gone. And he was left with nothing totally. So I was the youngest girl. And most of my sisters were married with so many cattles. All those cattles were stolen during war. So he valued me. He overprotected me so that I should go to school so that my life is not ruined like the lives of my sisters. Because after they got married, they lost everything. So it was so protected me. And he encouraged me to go to school. He spoke to me. He encouraged me to go and study. Your sister missed the school. You shouldn't miss. But also there was great opportunity that my elder brothers were able to help me and take me away from the village.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 3:22
Alice, your father, as you call him in the book, your I know that he was such a guiding light for you with your own journey to education and that you are passionate as a young girl for wanting to learn. And when you got to go to school, you picked it up so quickly. You were literate, you really enjoyed your studies. And then having to navigate the hardships and severe difficulties of war, you still were able to continue your studies. into. and I know your brother, Gabrielle was a huge source of protection and he also took after your Baba to help you get to school. He made sacrifices. education. One of the most profound quotes in your memoir, is called the school of restoration. I'll put the link in our show notes. If I may quote your father, He said... And, and can I ask you how your Baba said your name? Is it, Alise Chi? Cau I An I at the

ALICE ACHAN 4:19
Yes, Alise

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 4:21
is that a nickname?

ALICE ACHAN 4:22
No, that, that... A short phrase for Alice. So, instead of E, you I to remain like a praise name.

BERT LOCKWOOD 4:29
OK.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 4:31
Oh, that's beautiful. said, So, if I could your Baba. He said, you know, one day soon I will die. But, if I die, you are not to worry so much. The most important thing is your education. You have to study. And you promised him back, Baba, I will finish my studies. And I was curious if we could look back. Alice, you have helped thousands of girls, well over 4,000, pursue education. What do you think your Baba would say if he could walk across your campuses today?

ALICE ACHAN 5:05
I think my father would really be one of proudest of what I have done. And he would be proud that I was able to send so many girls to school. But I think more so, he was going to be very proud to see that I've broken the cultural barrier of allowing pregnant girls and breastfeeding mothers to sit and attend to school. I think that would make him the proudest. Seeing that a pregnant girl, a breastfeeding girl can sit in the class and study. That would really make him proud.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 5:40
you know, Alice, I have to shine a little spotlight on my dad, who probably doesn't always like praise. But growing up, that was one of our biggest pieces of our childhood was education. my father's a professor as an academic. And when my siblings and I got to go to university and seek higher education, he helped choose a path of liberal meaning to go to a university without a particular career in mind and to study everything, see what was of interest. I happened to fall in love with journalism. You know, is a split sector from writing to research to communications to marketing. and I really, put a spotlight on my dad and my mom for always just planting the seed of how important education is how it can carry you through life in different ways. And I really, really connected with your in the book. And it really just seems like a kindred moment to get to spotlight him on a father daughter human rights podcast with you as our honored guest.

ALICE ACHAN 6:47
Thank you so much. Thank you so much. And I really appreciate that because, you know, much as my father was his words, you know, r instruct. You know, the circumstances around, around my life really pushed me to think much and really have these words of my father stuck in my hair so that I complete just for him. He died before I complete even senior four. And that was the biggest challenge because things were not easy for me. And I remember every time I would remember I said, was I really, was really, if father was there, if father was there, wo encourage me because we were surrounded by war, a lot of difficulties. Yeah.

BERT LOCKWOOD 7:31

could you talk Joseph Kony and the, Lord's Resistance Army, my sense was that that had an impact on the communities where you, uh, grew up.

ALICE ACHAN 7:44
Yeah, I think the, the Joseph Kony conflict and the activities was one of the worst things I witnessed as a girl growing up, because they were, by, you know, abduction, killing, sexual violence, especially among the young girls. That was the worst, worst thing. And I think the greatest impact uhm, Joseph Kony were felt on women. And unfortunately that a lot scholars and a lot of, uhm, know, resear focus mainly on the general context, not specifically addressing the women issues. You know, one of the, one of the traumas that most of this girl lived with, up to now, is just losing their first child in the LRA captivity. Losing their pregnancy in the bush and burying their children in the bush is the trauma that most of these girls are. Today, even when you speak to this girl, thes things still come up. And that is the worst impact that the LRA has created in the lives of women. And honestly, no researchers have taken depth interest into that. But when you speak to these girls, they are still grieving that up to now. And, you know, living in continuous abuse, e day with the abductor, with the perpetrator, 'You are cooking for him, you are raising his children, he's commanding you, and you are following it.' It has created a devastating impact in the lives of many of these girls. And to many of these girls, by the way, most of them remain remain single mothers. Why? Because they were not able to deal with that trauma. W they get second chance into relationship,

a lot of community stigmatization, a lot of challenges in marriage and relationship trigger that one out and eventually leave the marriage. So, So most of these girls are living as single mothers of children who are born in LRF captivity, but also children who are born in the second marriage when they return home. And And this has not been addressed ever since. There are a lot of rehabilitation programs in northern Uganda, but there was no specific issues to address that. So that has really created a big, a big, a big problem. A few sections of girls who were able to go through school, did dedication and got professional work. Today, when you speak to them, they will bring that issue back. I'm talking specifically on a particular group of people who became a victim of LRA, especially the women and the girls, but for the general community, it has created a dysfunctional society. Why? It is quite challenging. You cannot transition from a conflict to post-conflict within same system of the government, which is not supportive, which is kind of corrupt, which does not respect human rights. But that a big challenge that we are faced on.

BERT LOCKWOOD 11:29
Is the Catholic have they played a role in this? Yes.

ALICE ACHAN 11:34
The church has played the role. The church has played the role. The society has played the role, but with very little support from the government, it has not held anything. Right Right now, most of the community who were in the IDP camps and and abandoned their LAN, general community are struggling over LAN now. That has made challenging because Every every single community is struggling over LAN. A lot of big junk of LAN is being taken away. A

lot of big junk of LAN is being leased because community have lost control. The community have lost the boundaries, an that has been one of the biggest impacts that has created the settlement of the IDP camps, has created that problem of the LAN.

BERT LOCKWOOD 12:29
Wow.

ALICE ACHAN 12:30
Talk about the dysfunctional of the community and the social, you know, social protection, which I already mentioned.

MEREDITH L 12:36
Mm.

BERT LOCKWOOD 12:37
Yeah.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 12:38
And, Alice, I was curious. One of our dear family friends in Botswana is Unity Dow. her and her children have started a school called the Dow Academy.

ALICE ACHAN 12:49
Oh.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 12:49
it focuses on really specialized studies, so a big part for them is technology, and it's from web design, c, computer science, as well as a different array of subjects. it's gone really well. But of course, Botswana is also having some economic

ALICE ACHAN 13:08
Yeah.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 13:09
And I was curious cause I know science is a big part of the School of Restoration for healthcare midwifery, but I was curious about technology. How has that been for you trying to provide that as a subject to your students?

ALICE ACHAN 13:24
Well, that has been a big challenge, recently we have received about 50 computers and solar powered, electricity, with the computer lab. Uh, and we are trying to encourage our girls in science, in the basic science. First of all, teaching them how to use computer, how to do research through internet and technology. It's just, just so basic. And it's our, thought to see how that these girls will be trained in high technology and with innovation, tha they can be

able to, you know, to innovate their things, with the computer and high speed that's where we are heading to,but at the moment it is still just very basic.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 14:05
basic. I loved the photo in the um, of you showing some of the girls, the first iPad you had, which must've been so cool. It's so flat, you know, you get everything out of a computer, but it's not as big and clunky as a computer. It's so flat that you're like, wait, this feels like it's coming to life off a page.

ALICE ACHAN 14:23
And this was very easy because we didn't have any power at all. So we had only one, and that was a thing far back in 2010 or 2012. And we had no electricity at all. So this was very handy because you could charge them and they can work like for over 10 hours, which was really very basic for the girls and helpful. Also for the teachers, y know?

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 14:44
have you used any solar powered, to help with electricity or any advancement for that?

ALICE ACHAN 14:50
Yes. We, right now we have solar, the school is solar powered. Even the hospital is solar powered. So we have the solar, and that has really been very helpful.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 15:00
and dad, could you tell Alice a little bit about Unity Dow?

BERT LOCKWOOD 15:03
Uh, yes. uh, uh, Alice, uh, Unity Dow's Botswanan, and she brought the first, constitutional rights-based, case, to the Botswanan High Court. um, challenging a gender discriminatory, uh, act, which provided that, if a Botswanan male married a foreigner, the children born to the marriage had Botswanan citizenship. If a Botswanan female married a foreigner, the children did not receive Botswanan citizenship. so the idea started, basica, Unity didn't see why she should be treated differently than her brother. And so, uh, she brought this challenge. the Botswanan government, did not, see this as a question of whether a few more kids got Botswanan citizenship, but as an attack upon its patriarchal

ALICE ACHAN 16:09
Hmm.

BERT LOCKWOOD 16:09
system.

ALICE ACHAN 16:10
Hmm.

BERT LOCKWOOD 16:10
And so they fought it tooth and nail. Um, uh, contacted, uh, Unity Dow and offered to,um , do what's called an amicus brief in her case, case, and, uh, we won that, and, the government appealed it, and then we won it in the, also in the highest court of Botswana. uh, Unity has, held a number of, uh, positions. She was the first female judge in Botswana appointed to the high court of Botswana.

ALICE ACHAN 16:43
Oh. She,

BERT LOCKWOOD 16:44
uh, served for ten years there. also was the minister of education. She was, the, uh, minister for foreign policy. and, no currently she's a, uh, member of parliament. uh, and, hopefully someday She'll be, the, the president.

ALICE ACHAN 17:04
that's. Won.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 17:06
that's a great place because, um, our dear friend, Professor Eric Stover says to you, Alice, that his favorite question to ask you is when are you becoming the prime minister of Uganda? So when I read that, it just reminded me of Unity Dow.

ALICE ACHAN 17:22
I know, I know. It you see, one thing I like uh, when we determine to do something as women, and we get the right people, you know, people with brilliant idea who understand our vision and, you know, work with us on the journey. There is always a success. And I want to thank you so much for picking that one up. um, it is, it is the case in Africa where, you know, governance and human rights become very sensitive and very political. And that's make it very narrow, you know, for some, for some, for some women really to push beyond. But I'm glad that the collaboration you had with her was able to yeah, when Eric said, I when I sent him that link, wher the Uganda law society had to close down because of security threat. So we said, okay, just a big mess, you know, right now in Uganda. And, you just want to stay in your line of service and leave the politics and dictatorship as for now, you know, quite, quite, quite sensitive and quite dangerous that you are, are bound to lose the girls, to lose the school, to be shut down, to have the account frozen. So we try to be very smart to ensure that the girls really get the right service. Yeah. So with politics, that will be when I'm 70 years probably.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 18:48
yeah. and Alice, if you could take us back to when you first got to meet professor Eric Stover and for our listeners, he was also a podcast guest and Eric currently serves as the faculty director of the human rights center. And he's the research professor of law at the university of California, Berkeley school of law. He spent decades advancing internal justice and documenting mass atrocities around the globe. Alice and Eric first met in Northern Uganda in

2005, while visiting the reception center for former children's soldier that you were directing at the time, Alice. Could you take us back to that time when you and Eric first got to meet?

ALICE ACHAN 19:29
Yeah, I met with Professor Eric in 2005 and I remember I think it was in a small, grass huts in a, in the, in the middle of IDP camps. um, and, um, it came in a convoy of soldiers and a small pickup truck and he came straight to the center with dust all over his body. And to us, it was, it was strange to see a white person coming. We didn't even know. And that was the time that we really needed somebody to speak to somebody to understand us and really know what we really, what we are going through.

So we Eric presented this is, is discussion and we opened up, you know, in the discussion with Eric.

And I remember the first thing, the immediate thing that came in my mind was, you know, the challenge to Eric so many people have been coming to us, you know, asking questions about the war, asking about the student, about the girls who are returning from the LRA. And it was always very difficult for us to speak over and over and would feel disappointed. And remember, I told Eric, I said, I hope you'll go and you'll do something for the girls and for the children. Because by that time, the school, the girls were not able to go to school. Most of them are children. And it was so painful to speak to them over and over and the same thing. So remember my word to Eric that I hope you'll go and come back with something for us. Th how our relationship and how we met Eric. And we began talking about rehabilitation of

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 21:20
Wow.

ALICE ACHAN 21:20
girls in Northern

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 21:21
And

ALICE ACHAN 21:21
Uganda.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 21:21
from there, you and Eric got to form a partnership with Berkeley's Human Rights Center, as well as the MacArthur Foundation that relationship establish the Padua Girls Academy in 2006, which, as we know, we'll talk about today is now the Tecuaro Foundation. Unfortunately, it was amazing. And important to note was able to present you with the Berkeley's Human Rights Center 20th Anniversary Award in recognition for your extraordinary leadership. And if I'm correct, Alice, you got to travel to California for the awards ceremony.

ALICE ACHAN 21:58
Yeah. it was a brief decision to present to Eric that despite all the rehabilitation, the psychosocial rehabilitation, medical rehabilitation, there was one major part which was very challenging for the girls. And that was the opportunity for the pasado, because many of them were abducted when they were in a lower primary school and secondary school and the missed opportunities three to four years. And this was a very urgent thing for us to respond. So when we presented this to Eric, I think he found the case that the best way to help girls settle back in their own community or encourage you to have a great And for any child who has been in conflict was to go through to go to go through education. And our education program was tailored towards supporting them, supporting their babies. Remember, most of these girls who returned from Delaware, many of them were either pregnant or they were breastfeeding. And yet there was no other school that would provide for them. So Eric, through his research and the team, That pick up the initiative and we're on the ground to implement what they have done. And indeed it was a brave decision because there was a lot of social stigma against these girls. Nobody wanted them, nobody wanted them in school, nobody wanted them in their own community, and they had nowhere to go. So our decision to have them be in school was the best, because they were able to learn, they were able to acquire new skills, which was really very key. So it was difficult decision, but brave with determination to break through the barrier, to break through policies and some of the guidelines from Ministry of Education, which they didn't have by that time. They did not have any clear policy, th did not have any clear guidelines on how to reintegrate the girls, particularly with babies who are returning from the LRA. So I had to make that brave decision to break through the Ministry of Education. Until one point the DO told me that he does not know what to do. Then I told him,what do you want me to do? He gave me a letter to go to Kampala, so I had to go to Kampala to the head office of Ministry of Education. He said that I wanted to go to Kampala. Do something for me. We are coming. And when they found the school, they couldn't believe it.

They went classes. So we had a small daycare center, and the girls were settled. And that really motivated them. But I remember they came out with the first draft guidelines on how to integrate girls with children returning from the LRA. And that's how brave I was. And of course, the collaboration with Professor Eric, with his students coming from the Human Rights Center, guiding us and supporting us. They helped us. We are a local organization. B, I didn't have much education. But the students who are coming from university were able to help us put up proposals together, put up the document together. And that led to winning some good money from the MacArthur Foundation that helped us establish a proper girls' school in 2008.

BERT LOCKWOOD 25:32
Alice, I'm the group that came from the government to view what you were the center that you had established, the education, were all male?

ALICE ACHAN 25:46
No, they two females and one male.

BERT LOCKWOOD 25:49

Okay. Do you think that made a difference?

ALICE ACHAN 25:52
Yes, they made a difference because needed a legal status to run the

BERT LOCKWOOD 25:58
No, no, no. What I meant was, do you think that the fact that there were two females on the government's

likely

ALICE ACHAN 26:09
I remember one lady, she sat with the girl. And when the girl was telling her story, you could see her tears crying.You could see her emotionally breaking down.

BERT LOCKWOOD 26:28
Okay. That's what I was curious.

ALICE ACHAN 26:31
Because I went, when I went to Kampala, I told them, I'm not going back until you give me something. I'm not going back. So I stayed in Kampala for one week and every day I would go to the ministry. Of education office until they gave me a letter to come and bring to the district to allow me to operate the school. Then they've came later on to visit what they, what we're doing. Yeah.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 26:55
That is the definition of tenacity. And also just showing your confidence, Alice, that you believed in what you were doing and know that with the right resources and approval, you could build it. I thought it was interesting that when you were speaking to the government officials, one of them admitted that they didn't know what to do. They didn't know how to fix that problem. And it sounds like they actually listened to your ideas and feedback, especially since you were hands on the ground. You saw firsthand what was going on and knew that education, shelter, safety was a pathway forward and that you yourself could help do that with your social work training, your own background, the community you had. I really think that's important that I was really happy that they would listen to you and then you showed them that you were able to follow through with that.

ALICE ACHAN 27:46
And surprisingly, you know, we were still in the TEN, we were still building the school, we had big tree and a small TEN, which were provided by UNICEF and the girls were learning under the TEN, but you could see the, you know, how the girls were very interested and how they were very committed in learning. So that was another thing that also gave me the motivation. And when they came, I think they saw the motivation and the importance of integrating

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ALICE ACHAN 28:14
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ALICE ACHAN 28:15
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MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 28:15
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ALICE ACHAN 28:16
school.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 28:16
2008, there's the Pader Girls Academy officially opened and there was approximately around 300 girls and 70 babies?

ALICE ACHAN 28:26
Yes.

And right now, right now, you know what we have? We have like over 1,000 girls in school. we still kept the sector for daycare because there's still a lot of incidents of teenage pregnancy. Right now, as I speak, we have about 10 young mothers in one of our campuses and three expected young girls who are actually underage because they're in Form 1, which is basically about 14 years old. And, you know, the story behind it, you don't want to go into that. But I just said, now for me, what I want is to make sure the girls go to school. Whatever happened in the community, defilement issues is so complicated. So we receive them as they are. So we

have them in the school. We have three campuses per day, which is the main campus. It is open for all girls. B we have one particular campus, which is in Western, actually, near the Marshall Game Park, which was also built by the MacArthur Foundation. It is designated for the pregnant girls and vulnerable girls who need counseling. Now, somebody would ask, why was there still pregnancy when there is no conflict? the post-conflict sexual violence is still very high. The community is so broken. The community is so disoriented that the safety network that would protect girls is completely is broken. And that's why you still see a lot of teenage pregnancy. We also see a lot of early child marriage arranged by the community because of the backwardness, because of the negative culture. It is still there. So that's why you can see a lot of young girls still come with babies in school. And that particular campus provides counseling, help communication and coordination with the parents and the government, especially children's welfare.

MEREDITH L 30:29
Absolutely. Alice, thank you for sharing what happened to the young girls during LRA's regime. And in your memoir, you taught the reader the word for and as we know, even here in 2026 around the world, femicide and sexual violence is prevalent. We have to be very kind of surveillance, girls and women, and we must do more stop it. And it comes to also educating young men, parents that are raising boys, that we have to end the violence against young girls and women. I found it truly profound when I learned that the word "rape" in your native language, I'm gonna try to pronounce it and you can help me, Niwaro?

ALICE ACHAN 31:24
They call it anewa.

MEREDITH L 31:25
and the meaning behind

ALICE ACHAN 31:26
Mm.

MEREDITH L 31:26
that is taking what is not yours.

ALICE ACHAN 31:29
Yes. Yes.

MEREDITH L 31:30
When I read that, I realized that meaning is heartbreaking, but also deeply revealing. Because within the definition of a word, it literally tells you what is not yours, that this is, this is wrong. And yet it still happens. And not just in Uganda, in other countries. And I, I, I, I am curious now if, if there is, and perhaps I'm, I'm hopeful here. Is there a cultural shift happening in Uganda amongst a younger generation to respect girls and women a little more?

ALICE ACHAN 32:11
would say there's some small percentage of shift. Why? I would say education has contributed a lot in a way that the girls have the power, th girls have the professional, the girls have the independency. That is the only component. But culturally it is still, this still believes that when a girl is raped, she looked for it, the way she's dressed, she has gone where the boys are, she has gone maybe to, she's gone for the water lawn, you wanted to be, to be raped, why did you go for water lawn? So there's still a lot of cultural blames on raped. And raped in our society is still not looked as a major problem.Including the file men. There is a lot of cover up. A lot of cover up. Why? Why? When you go to court of law, you are exposing your family. You are exposing relationship issues. So for a girl to go and contest in the court that I'm defiled on this very day, it will never happen. Because the community feels that will bring shame onto the clan. And that's why it is still very, very challenging. But for many girls who are educated and independent and are working, they have fought for the file men, they have fought for rape and they have won the battle. Because they are able to get a good lawyer, they are able to follow it up. You can imagine an old woman in the village who needs to come to court like after every two months, after every three months. She needs to bring her daughter. She needs come with the transport money. It is not possible. So the court system also does not favor at all. And that is the bigger issue that you know, it is so difficult to handle. And that's why it makes it very complicated. For the issue of rape defile men in my community.

MEREDITH L 34:21
a place of hope for you, Alice was under the kworo tree. I really thought it was such a beautiful moment in your story. When you returned home to your community, which was carrying deep wounds. And you, Alice, as we've talked about many girls had escaped captivity. They did come back with children. They were traumatized. Some were not accepted back into their families, their villages. They didn't have anywhere to turn. And others also had lost years of education. And we're struggling to imagine what their future could look like. And rather than immediately beginning with the school, you first listened. You and other women gathered beneath a kworo tree to share their stories, to grieve, to support one another. And this was the first step toward what is now the Te-Kworo Foundation. Could you take us back to what you remember about those early conversations underneath the tree?

ALICE ACHAN 35:28
I think one of the important of that tree is that it was a healing process for me because I also had my trauma. I had my brokenness from the loss of the loved ones because of war and HIV/AIDS. And it was so difficult for me. But then when we came together and shared our story, we found there was a strong bond. We found hope in one another because we realized that we were not going through this alone. Many of us were going through it. But the most important thing that we were able to listen to each other, support each other. It helped us to heal together. It helped us not to sit on our own problem, but to share it out and help each other to grow and create a support system. So the tree, that kworo tree helped us to create a very strong support system, which later became a great support to many younger girls who needed us. Because after we came together and built our strong support system, we were able to help so many young girls who have seen worse situations than us. especially those girls who

were returning directly from their corn abduction. Who had witnessed atrocities, who were abused, and they were so broken. So the memory of the tree is just healing together. you know, Creating support system... ...for our own community.

MEREDITH L 37:19
And if I'm correct, te-kworo means gathering under a tree in your language?

ALICE ACHAN 37:25
Yes. Tekorumin under the tree. And it's traditional that elders were sitting and discussing important matter, Because because we don't have a big community hall, but that tree quarrel traditionally were used to settle important matters during those days where elders would come and make decisions, where elders would come and do rituals, where the cleansing rituals, prayers and blessing. So it's just a significant and iconic tree for us in the Luo community of northern Uganda.

MEREDITH L 38:11
Alice, my dad and I loved this photo in the book. photo. And I'm going to read the caption. The whole school gathers for assembly under a large tree. the school hall can hold all the students, the favorite gathering place during the dry season is outside under the tree where it's fresh and open and the children can run around. And Alice, i I put myself in your shoes and imagine where you began under a smaller tree, perhaps, and now your whole school assembly gathers under this large, beautifu tree, it must feel like a full circle moment for you at times.

ALICE ACHAN 38:49
True, true. And of course, yo know, seeing the girls loving the girls enjoying it, it's the greatest joy. And honestly, that's what keeps me doing more and more for the girls. If I can only find a place where girls can be happy and free, and if they can be anywhere, like under the tree within the school, tha your open happiness and freedom to me.

BERT LOCKWOOD 39:13
Wow. I'm curious, do you detect a significant significant change in toward the work you're doing? other words, has there been more acceptance your efforts over time?

ALICE ACHAN 39:33
I think our organization, Tech World Foundation, is one of the most respected local organizations in the community. And personally, I would say, I'm one of the most recognized women in my own community. community. I've just been baptized by the name, the great mother. So everybody call me Meggo. It's like a great mother.

BERT LOCKWOOD 39:58
Wow.

ALICE ACHAN 39:59

You know, everyone calls me Meggo, Meggo Alice. That is my second baptized name. Just because the work that we have been doing with the girls from the time of conflict. And up to now, we have been very consistent in working with girls. and women. And a lot of newborn girls. Who are named Alice.

BERT LOCKWOOD 40:23
so

MEREDITH L 40:24
Oh,

ALICE ACHAN 40:24
many Alice's

MEREDITH L 40:25
wow. Wow.

ALICE ACHAN 40:25
in my own community.

MEREDITH L 40:27
What a great honor.

ALICE ACHAN 40:30
I know. I know. And that's how the best way that the community can honor somebody by naming a child after you, even if you are not family.

BERT LOCKWOOD 40:39
Well, there's, there was a article in New York times that, name. Donal, has, plummeted to a new low in, in American society.

ALICE ACHAN 40:51
I mean, surprising. do you know, we have a lot of children in Uganda who are named George Bush.

MEREDITH L 40:58
oh, oh.

ALICE ACHAN 40:59
we have Bill Clinton. we have Obama. Obama is there. highest in Africa, that Several Several children who are born the first time that Obama became the president. Several children, boys, I name Obama.

MEREDITH L 41:17

is fabulous.

ALICE ACHAN 41:17
So the, there, there was, African-appreciating. Surprisingly, I don't they appreciate -- Sometimes -- ...ad and good. We have children who are called Saddam also,

MEREDITH L 41:29
Oh. Oh.

ALICE ACHAN 41:29
unfortunately. Sorry.

MEREDITH L 41:32
Well, Alice, I, hope you had the honor of coming to Chicago and getting to walk amongst the Obama Presidential Center Museum. I got to go for the pre-opening in May this year and it was, it was transcendent. It is one of the most intentional, thoughtfully

ALICE ACHAN 41:51
--

MEREDITH L 41:51
curated museums I've ever been to.

ALICE ACHAN 41:55
Wow. Wow. That is, I just, I love.

MEREDITH L 42:00
Oh,

ALICE ACHAN 42:00
And you know, well,

MEREDITH L 42:01
me too.

ALICE ACHAN 42:02
when I came the U. S., I think in 2009, people said, you look like Michelle. I said, no, no, no. Because I'm

BERT LOCKWOOD 42:09
that

ALICE ACHAN 42:09

tall. kind of thing. But I just love the lady, and it would be so lovely. You know, these are the people who really inspire and, you know, encourage you to do more for the people. I love his story when he said that he came and he found the community when he made his speech. It really made me cry because I remember when I came back after all my brokenness and I came and I met this lady who had the same experience, like what I've been through. And we born together and build our community. I just cried when me. made his speech how he came back to Chicago, you know. I This is exactly what we did, you know, 20 years ago. with Of Paris, yeah.

BERT LOCKWOOD 42:52
Yeah.

MEREDITH L 42:52
Well, and Alice, you, you and Barak have something fundamentally in common. this. The power of listening. That is a gift and a talent to actually open up and listen. Because sometimes a lot of people want to be heard, but we speak over that. And one of the things that I think has made Barack Obama such a significant leader is that when he went to Chicago in the South Side, he sat in the South Side, he sat in church basements and listened to grassroots leaders and pastors and asked community members, what do they need?

ALICE ACHAN 43:27
and

MEREDITH L 43:28
What

ALICE ACHAN 43:28
pastors

MEREDITH L 43:28
are hardships in their life? How can I make your life better? And you did that exact same thing when you returned to your village. You listened to women. You had a vision and you built it brick by brick. And now you have three campuses women. with you and Barack Obama having that special gift, I wanted to tell our audience a little bit more about why you call it the School of Restoration. Because the girls and women part of your school programs, they don't just walk away with a diploma, but they away with livelihoods, with mental health services. Once you are young mothers, you provide daycare and there's daycare workers and the young girls can take breaks during the day to feed the babies. At night, they're able to be mothers together and raise these beautiful little ones to be future leaders as well. Could you tell us more about what the School of Restoration means to you?

ALICE ACHAN 44:29
help you? that,that school of restoration is, it's really my, my, my, I would say my soft spot because by the time we pick this girl from the community or from the time they come to our school, they completely have no hope. They have been out of school for many years, they had

no scholarship materials, and more so, most of them have been, you know, abused, assaulted, and they ended up pregnancy. And when they come, they completely have no hope, so our school does a restoration, a, not only in mental health, not only in physically, but also provide soft support for their children. Why is it very important? When a mother, when the child is not comfortable, a mother will never settle, no matter what, and our best place was to ensure that that we have a good daycare for these girls. The babies are secured. And by the way, we did not have a trained childcare workers.But we selected and we picked these grandmothers in their 60s, in their 70s, who would come and be with the babies and provide support and care for the babies, but also to the girls. And they'll be with the babies, but also to the girls, but also to the girls, because most of these girls didn't know parenting, they didn't know how to breastfeed their babies, they didn't know how to take care of their babies, they didn't know how to identify whether the child is sick or has fever. So this grandmother was brought into school to train these girls in parenting. And makes it a whole restoration process for us. Because bringing a girl who had been so broken, an orphan who has been abused and putting her in the hand of a caring mother, it just bridged all the gaps.And so that's why we named it the school of restoration, because we put you back to school, we restore your hope, we restore your dignity, we take care of your baby, we give you good feeding, our whole life cycle of restoration, which many schools, by the way, do not give it, Which which many schools do not provide. But we found that this is the way to go to help women settle, because what they have been through, it does not need a single support, it does need a comprehensive support, and that will help to restore them, their dignity and hope back. And that's why we named it the school of restoration, because it starts from the first day the girl returned from the bush to the end that some key girls managed to go to our school, went to university, and now they're professional and working in their own community. So it's not only school of restoration, the school of restoration of the community of Northern, Uganda.

BERT LOCKWOOD 47:27
Ab.

MEREDITH L 47:28
there's in the memoir of another photo that shows one of the classroom chalkboards. And in white chalk, it says that education is better than marriage. you know, to me, that is feminism 101. But I know in your culture, it means much more than just, men and women getting married, relying on each other. And I really appreciated that the teachers at

Te-Kworo open up conversations for women to think outside cultural box, and really have hearty conversations. And I'm sure there's, you know, open debates and learning from each other, sharing different experiences. But it really paints the picture that your school, the young women, you are allowing them to dream big.

ALICE ACHAN 48:21
Yea, it's a simple statement, but it really carries a lot of message in the lives of these girls. Speaking positive about their lives, speaking positive and encourage the girls to pursue their education, to pursue their career, it is very key. It is a very simple thing when a girl goes back

home during holidays and can easily be married off because of one single factor. The mother says, "I don't have the money." You are big enough to be a woman of your own. th two statements normally trigger girls to make a radical decision. And for the parents, ... who will not ban education will just push their daughter into marriage. So, that's why we have to make that simple statement, "Education is better than marriage." And a lot of . . . . and they discuss, they talk about it, it should be a statement that they have to hear every now and then, because otherwise they have a lot of . . . a single factor can make a girl drop her to school or never end up . . . Not . . . . I would not even say marriage, like, you know, a full marriage where in the church, in the court, this is what we call cohabiting, whic is not sustainable. . . . . maybe after giving birth to one child or two children, the man chased you away, bring another woman. I mean, you talk about it, we did not mention polygames. Most of these young girls end up in a polygames marriage, going for a second woman or a third woman, because of your factors are forcing her from our own society. So so education you better than those decision that will force sign to marry yeah

MEREDITH L 50:03
I know, Alice, growing up in village, your father had multiple wives. And yours was actually quite unique. You guys really lived in harmony. It was quite peaceful. But in other families in other areas, it could be tense between the different mothers, different wives. so I thought that was really interesting in your journey, understand the dichotomy of a poly marriage, poly community. I also wanted to segue into health care because. And then lack of health care was still there and to quote some of the girls that they were able to survive bullets by the LRA, but they couldn't survive malaria by a mosquito. And I also know that HIV and AIDS has also been prevalent throughout history in Uganda and of course around the world. I am so honored to talk about the newly open 42-bed Sonic Kworo Hospital, which is such a milestone that reflects more than two decades of listening and responding to the needs of the community. Could you take us back to when you grew that seed that became a vision of providing maternal and neonatal care as well as just essential health care? To your community, which is now a fully standing operating hospital?

ALICE ACHAN 51:24
yeah that was in 2008 when we we just received this first lot of the girls the pioneer of the girl the school and one of the girls was six months pregnant and she had malaria and she was direct who returned from the lra and they were settled in school and it happened that because she had malaria and there were lack of proper medical facilities she passed on and i remember that day it was very difficult for us in schools you know the girls were crying the girls were mourning and they were saying oh really you can't survive bullets and we come and die of malaria and all this kind of things so it was really so painful and i remember very clearly most of the girls of course like i i mentioned most of them had their first pregnancy and they lost it in the bush and most of them miscarried while in the bush so most of them when they wanted to when they real when they saw that even their colleague died when they already out of danger and they're back in the community

they all wanted to go and do medical courses the first five years was so difficult for us because most of these girls were already above the school age they already had children one or two and some of them were pregnant and we wanted to see that something that would not delay them in school again so what we did the first five years after they completed from our school we're able to put them into nursing and midwifery training within northern uganda so the majority of our girls when they completed grade 10 which is senior four they were able to go and do nursing and midwifery

MEREDITH L 53:14
Hmm.

ALICE ACHAN 53:15
For two years and a half.

BERT LOCKWOOD 53:16
OK.

ALICE ACHAN 53:17
So we had the six years in school, four years in secondary school, and two years into professional training of midwife and nursing. And when these girls completed, they wanted to do something. They wanted to help the community. How? They wanted to go in the community and support the community. And then through our partners in Australia, Pili Pau helped me, we wrote the book together. They mobilized, the ambulance, and they brought it in the community for these girls so that they can able to reach out. So they started going in the community, carrying mobile clinic, carrying antinatal care, providing vaccination, providing, you know, uh, deworming for children, goin to their own community, providing those services.And that's when, by the way, the community began to realize the importance of girls going to school. B to them, seeing a girl who returned from the LRA, who was completely despised, who was, you know, rejected doing now treating the women, it became a turning point for us, a stakeholder foundation. So when this girl began to go to the community, they really helped so many women get birth safely. But then it was so difficult because some complication issues, we have to drive like three, four hours away to, to, to provide, you know, professional, you know, support because of some complications like twins, you know, bridge, birth, they had to send them to other hospitals. Then, we opened a small clinic whereby we can bring mothers there. But that clinic became overwhelmingly with like, in a day, we could see like 10 mothers in a month, y could have 50 women give birth in that small clinic. And it grew with a lot of demands, a lot of community picked interest. And then in 2020, when there was lockdown, I was stuck in Sydney, like for six months during lockdown. And we already had the ambulance. Yeah. And the, the demand for ambulance services, the demand for delivery in our small facilities became so, so, so, so high. And the beauty of this is that these very girls who studied in our school, who studied in their own community, were the very ones who are providing support to their own people. That's when people realized that it is so important to allow the girl to study. So when these girls worked during the lockdown, overwhelmingly, there were a number of cases and complications. That's when a partner in Australia, Sonic

Healthcare, came up, you know, and Barbara, Barbara May Foundation, said, can we work together and build something appropriate? Because the demand was really well. I remember that one time we could drive like 20, I mean, two hours or three hours. Three times in a day for women who would need emergency caesarean. Because we couldn't, there was nothing in Pade. Then in 2021, 2022, we came together with Sonic Healthcare, Barb May, and we were able to identify a good land and build the maternity center. I still again dedicated to the women. Why? The The majority of women who are giving birth in northern Uganda, they are below 20. They are at risk, mother, who are prone to emergency caesarean during birth. And that's why we said, now, yes, even if they are educated, but we still have this gap. And we said, now, what can we do? The best is to provide a facility that will help these women. And that's how we came up with the vision and idea to build a specific women's hospital in northern Uganda.A place where nobody is very remote. The nearest city is about three, four hours' drive. And this is how we are able to build up Sonic Quoro mean hospital. It is located in Nagago, and it's going to serve five districts. districts over Choli And about 30% 30% of our girls are working in that hospital, Which is, to me, is amazing. and a very beautiful thing.

MEREDITH L 57:49
30%. Wow.

ALICE ACHAN 57:52
of our girls I did. in our school I did one. working in that hospital.

BERT LOCKWOOD 57:56
Wow.

ALICE ACHAN 57:56
Yeah.

MEREDITH L 57:57
I encourage, Alice,our listeners, which again, I will add to our show notes, to read 2025 annual report of the Te-Kworo Foundation. you can find on page 18, Sarah's story of hope. And Sarah was 22, pregnant with her first child, and she had to be rushed to a local clinic. She was diagnosed with eclampsia, which we know is a rare but life-threatening pregnancy complication. And thanks to emergency medicine, her baby was born as a preemie. and early access to medicine, the baby reached healthy weight by three months. And Sarah's success story underscores the importance of having the local continued community care. And now, today, she encourages other expectant mothers to attend their prenatal care as well as share the story of her pregnancy and making it through a scare and encouraging other mothers that this health care is essential. And that's because of you, your team, your community, and the outreach you do.

ALICE ACHAN 59:07
Yeah. Yeah. We still continue doing a lot of outreaches. Why? Because there are communities which are very far away from the hospital. And of course, some of them are single mothers.

Like I said, mothers at risk. Some of them are single mothers. Some of them mothers. And they find it who are single mothers that are single mothers. And of course, they find it so difficult to come to the hospital because of lack of support. So going in the community will help us to identify the early risk in mothers, and we give additional support. So even if we have the hospital in Agargo, we'll still continue carrying the mobile clinic because that is where we identify early risk in pregnancy, which is still very important.

BERT LOCKWOOD 59:49
Alice, Alice, this has been a real and honor to be able speak with you today. You're doing fascinating work. I know our listeners will very enlightened kinds of efforts it takes assist young women.

ALICE ACHAN 1:00:07
Thank Thank you. Yeah, and I just want to say thank you so much for our different partners, Eric Stoffer. And I a friend in Chicago, called Jeannie and Chris. They have been a great friend and supporter. worked with IRC International Rescue Committee. And she has been a great friend for over 20 years. She lives in Chicago every time she comes to Uganda. They have been supporting us. You know, we have Mary Page. Mary Page, I'm sure you know Mary Page. You work

BERT LOCKWOOD 1:00:35
Yeah.

ALICE ACHAN 1:00:35
with MacArthur Foundation. They have been a great support. You know, Eric introduced me to so many friends and I appreciate the partnership. And I've always said this, that partnership is Great way to go. When you got, when. when you have Good partners. and Collaboration. Makes work go on.

BERT LOCKWOOD 1:00:53
Ab.

MEREDITH L 1:00:54
Alice, for our listeners who want to support your work, the hospital, the schools, helping young girls advance their education, what are the best ways they can show up and support?

ALICE ACHAN 1:01:05
if you go through our website, you'll be able to see how you can through donation. and we don't know what the U

MEREDITH L 1:01:13
I really encourage our listeners, if they have the means, to donate, which they can do directly on your website. which, again, will be linked in our show Well, thank you so much. This has been such an honor, and we really appreciate you sharing not only your story, but the story of

other young who are seeking to soar to higher heights with your leadership as the great mother. And our gratitude to our dear friend, Eric Stover, for making this new connection.

ALICE ACHAN 1:01:42
Thank you so much and thank you for this opportunity to meet all house of you. It

MEREDITH L 1:01:46
Thank you so much, Alice.

ALICE ACHAN 1:01:47
Thank Thank you.

BERT LOCKWOOD 1:01:48
Bye-bye.

Alice's story is a powerful reminder of the transformative role education can play, not only in the life of one person, but across families and entire communities.

Track 8 1:02:03
That vision continues through the thousands of girls and young women Te-Kworo has supported and through its expanding work in education and health care. If you haven't yet heard our conversation with Professor Eric Stover, we hope you'll go back and listen to his episode as well. Eric shares more about his longtime friendship with Alice and the early days of this remarkable work.

BERT LOCKWOOD 1:02:25
We are grateful to Alice for joining us and to all of you for listening.

Track 8 1:02:30
Please subscribe to Human Rights, Conversations Across Generations, wherever you listen to podcasts. And if you enjoy the show, leave us a rating or a review. It helps more people find these inspiring stories. Until next time.