

Transcript – Go Global ED Podcast: Episode 2– Dr. Ida Rousseau Mukenge, retired professor of Sociology at Morehouse College. Five-time Fulbrighter, including two Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad (Mexico & Brazil) speaks with Dr. Pamela Maimer, Senior Program Officer, U.S. Department of Education

[Amy/Intro]: Welcome to the Go Global ED Podcast, brought to you by the International and Foreign Language Education Team also, also known as IFLE, in the Office of Postsecondary Education at U.S. Department of Education.

Today on the podcast we're speaking with Dr. Ida Rousseau Mukenge. This spring Dr. Mukenge retired after 50-year career at Morehouse College where she was a Sociology Professor and the founding director of the Morehouse Research Institute, Director of the NIMH Faculty Development Project in mental health, research, and chair of the W.E.B. Du Bois International House Living Learning Residence. Mukenge's scholarship is wide ranging and reflects her passion for African heritage and the social transformation with more than half century of studying working and conducting research in Africa and about the African diaspora. Mukenge's research interests and capabilities are broad, ranging from relationships between work identity and mental health to church in society women in leadership and social justice. Throughout her career Dr. Mukenge received five Fulbright awards and with the support of the U.S. Department of Education's IFLE grant funding, she established Morehouse in Oaxaca and Morehouse and in Bahia, two Fulbright-Hays programs for collegiate and K through 12 educators in the humanities and social sciences.

As we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Fulbright-Hays programs and International Education Week we're thrilled to welcome Dr. Mukenge to the podcast to reflect on her long and impactful career, discuss important topics in international education, and share insights into the Fulbright-Hays programs and how others might pursue these grants and fellowships.

For the interview we're also joined by Dr. Pamela Maimer, a Senior Program Manager in the Fulbright-Hays division who has worked on several IFLE grant and fellowship programs. During her career at IFLE Dr. Maimer has had the privilege to work with Dr. Mukenge in various capacities, including as a Fulbright-Hays grant reviewer.

Thank you, Ida, and Pamela, for joining us on the podcast. Pamela, I'm going to hand it over to you to get us started.

[Pamela] Thanks Amy. Thanks again for joining us on the podcast Dr. Rousseau Mukenge.

[Ida] Thank you for inviting me to in this wonderful occasion.

[Pamela] So to start off, can you tell us a little bit about how you initially, given your background, became interested in language learning and in international research?

[Ida] Well, it's a long story. (laughs) Actually, my interest in languages started when I was in junior high school. In 7th grade we had the opportunity at time, I was born in Texas, but I grew up in California, and in 7th grade we had the opportunity to choose either French or Spanish to study. I chose French because I was always interested in what's different in Spanish was all around me. So, I chose French. I loved it. I went all the way through high school studying French, advanced classes and reading and then when I went to college, I decided to major in French I was still very much interested in communication and languages and that was the beginning of my interest in languages. But I've also been interested in other people and other cultures. I went to a church growing up as a child where we had foreign students, mostly students from Africa and students from Kenya and Ghana. And we were always introduced to them I always wanted to ask them questions about home and what it was like in Africa, to try to allay some of the images that were presented on TV. So that added to my interests in, in the rest of the world but particularly in Africa. Another experience I had when I was in undergrad in 1958, the first students from the Republic of Guinea came to Cal to study and I was introduced to them, and it was just wonderful being able to speak French and being able to introduce them to my parents and to my friends. So, all of that did sort of continue to encourage me to maintain my connection with languages as well as my connection with the rest of the world but particularly Africa. And I think that's probably due to I think it may be due to my mother's experience, but also probably due to my father's experience, he was very much what they used to call 'a race man' man so he always instilled us pride in race and knowing where you come from, knowing where you belong, and knowing who you are and I think that's why my interest in the rest of the world focused primarily on Africa and people of African descents that sort of like the beginning, but it's a long story (laughs).

[Pamela] But it's so interesting because you were there for a lot of what has laid the foundation of the civil rights movement and especially, I think taking on languages as your interest. You've been able to look at things from a global perspective during a time where many of us didn't have those opportunities to do that so you're a real trailblazer in that area. And so, I want to ask what kind of impact do you think, because you were there for some of the beginning so for international exchange programs and programs like the Fulbright-Hays program, what kind of impact do you feel that that had on your career and how have international education and the international programs impacted your scholarship?

[Ida] Okay. It's interesting because I did not, when I was an undergraduate, I did not have an opportunity to study abroad. I'm from a working-class family and a scholarship student had to go through and get through. But I'm also the Peace Corps generation. I didn't join the Peace Corps, but I did join a program called Teachers for West Africa. And I went to Sierra Leone where I was the French mistress for the 1-5 -- 2-4 in a School for Girls and it's there that I realized that language wasn't enough to be able to communicate. It is not just about language, but it's also about culture and so I wanted to go back I wanted to become involved in cultural exchanges of all sorts but with French at that time they had only binational centers and the only binational center was in was in Haiti and they didn't need anybody, so somebody encouraged me to do the Foreign Service so I came back and did the comparative education degree and did a lateral entry into the Foreign Service and that's why I became French teaching not French,

English teaching officer in the Congo. So, but I'm still like not involved in in Fulbright, not involved in exchanges, involved in international work international education but not in making the kind of impact that Fulbright and Fulbright-Hays can make on education broadly. After I left the Foreign Service, I decided that that wasn't really what I wanted to do, I didn't want to be a representative of US abroad, I wanted to be involved in transforming black education.

[Pamela] That's fantastic.

[Ida] Yeah so, I went back to went back to Berkeley to get a doctorate in sociology and I was part of a cohort that decided that indeed we were going to transform black education and shortening it, that's why I ended up at Morehouse and it's at Morehouse that I got my first introduction to the connections the people-to-people connection that are part of Fulbright and study abroad and all those things that I didn't do as an undergraduate. My first Fulbright was, I came to Morehouse in 71, my first one was 74/75 and I just sort of fell into it, I'm looking for a something interesting, my Dean said, I think her name was Linda Rhode, this was a long time ago, she's coming to talk about Fulbright programs, I ought to go and talk to her. So, I did and I applied for the Fulbright. I had the language, I had an idea, I was interested in political socialization, so that was my research project. I got the I got the Fulbright to the Congo which at that time I think it was called Zaire. So that was my first Fulbright in 74/75 and, by the way, that's also where I met my family that I currently have, my married family, my husband's from there. But there was something else about the Fulbright the individual Fulbright the Fulbright Scholar Program is good, for self-development, for expanding your horizons, for fulfilling your research passion but there's something missing in what you can share, and that's where the Fulbright Hays Group Projects Abroad comes in. With that I felt that I was able to share more of what I was experiencing with my colleagues and my students and that's what inspired me to become involved in the Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad and then we did those two courses, still with the focus on Africa and the African diaspora, the one to Brazil, Morehouse in Bahia the second one, to Mexico, Morehouse in Oaxaca.

[Pamela] And so that kind of relationship with Morehouse has been really your work at Morehouse has been so pivotal. And I understand that your personal mission was "Take Morehouse to the World and Bring the world to Morehouse" and it seems as though, with your focus on improving black education at Morehouse, you really had a chance to do that. And how did you act on your personal mission, and why do you feel that it's so important, then and now?

[Ida] Ah yes. It continues to be important. I did everything I could to ensure that the full expanse of the world was visible to my colleagues to share with my colleagues and with my students. So that meant that I had to be involved in promoting study abroad, welcoming international students, and interacting with international students, encouraging my colleagues my faculty colleagues to become involved to apply for education abroad grants or research grants abroad to infuse into our curriculum, aspects of the world because everybody can't everybody can't travel out, then what can we do to assure that there is internationalization in the curriculum as well as the experiences on campus? And also, I sponsored three Brazilian students. That's an interesting story just sort of happened. My husband and I became

interested in Brazil through a program called Cycles, it was an inner-institutional consortium for African and Latin American research, but we decided not to do Africa, but to do Latin America and the Latin American site happened to be Brazil and that's where we became involved in Brazil. But everything international I wanted to be involved in. In whatever ways I could expand the international experience at Morehouse, I did it. I encouraged our application for a Title VI grant, and we got it, I encouraged as I said most of those and took the lead on both of those Fulbright Hays Group Projects Abroad that that we directed. I promoted the teaching of languages and I always kept, I always call myself sort of an honorary member of the Department of Modern Foreign Languages. I had close relationships with them. The immediate past immediate chair of modern languages has been very instrumental in continuing what we've been doing and what we've been trying to do. When he was Chair, he was responsible for bringing in the current chair of the department who introduced Portuguese so now Morehouse teaches Portuguese along with French, Spanish, German and Chinese also. But I was so pleased to get a Portuguese instructor and the Portuguese program that we do in in collaboration with Spellman. Seems like everything international, just about everything international, I've been involved in to lend whatever support and to encourage others to do the same. And I think with that, Morehouse has really become a world house, I can't take credit for all of it, but I can certainly take credit for the push, for putting my effort into to ideas that others had. One of my colleagues in in the department, a young colleague that I was responsible for bringing in, so I can take credit for bringing her in, so she started the Morehouse pan African Global Experience and I did everything that I could to make sure that that carried out and she's expanded now to another institute it's an international and comparative labor studies institute so that that all of that you know I look at and I see well it's happening and it continues to happen. And I hope that the ones who are there now will continue to take Morehouse to the world and bring the world to Morehouse.

[Pamela] That's fantastic. I mean just the breadth and depth of what you've done it's just so inspiring. I wanted to ask you a question about - so many of us who grew up in a low-income, first-generation, minority households had families who were very hesitant about encouraging their students to travel abroad. It wasn't something they were familiar with and had a lot of fear. So, what did you do and how did you to encourage the students and work with families to help their student's kind of overcome that cultural barrier around traveling abroad?

[Ida] I can't say that I have really been involved in dealing with families, but I think that encouraging students to be curious so that every class that I teach is not just US space but it's particularly with an African-centered approach and an African-centered approach that identifies not only Africans in the North American diaspora but Africans wherever we are in the world. And to encourage their curiosity by giving them assignments to do this do that and do the other. We have only one anthropology course that that we teach, we've been teaching it for a very long time, and in that course, I always give the students an assignment that you're a development anthropologist and this is a problem, what would you do? How would you explain to a student who doesn't know anything about anthropology, if you had to preserve a cultural site somewhere in the world, what is the site and where would you preserve it? So that way they have to go and find out in order to do the assignment. So, my approach is that if the

students get excited enough about going abroad and about learning about other cultures, then they can have this presented to them and if they get excited enough, then their parents will do everything to be sure that they go. It's the same thing, yeah, I told you that I that I sponsored three Brazilian students and they were students from moderate income families, actually they were part of an institute that was started by some graduate students who just wanted to increase educational opportunities for Afro-Brazilian students. Well, when we interviewed those students who were who were going to participate, one of the father's said well I'm going to do whatever I can to be sure that my son or daughter has this opportunity. So, when the when the students are enthusiastic, parents, particularly parents who have their sons and daughters in college for the first time, they're going to do everything that they can and everything within their power they make big sacrifices so that their kids can know the world and can have opportunities that they didn't have.

[Pamela] And I think that's the key, is that for the different generations and you've been able to travel to Africa and South America and other various countries, so what have you seen over the years? How has traveling abroad changed, and where do you think there are some areas that are unique but also how things are different from how were when you traveled or when your groups traveled?

[Ida] Well first of all, it's easier, it's cheaper [laughter] and it's more convenient. That's one thing I've realized as an elder, that they're all kinds of supports just because you're old so it's more convenient. And not necessarily an elder but there are other kinds of disabilities, for lack of a better word, that are that make it easier for everybody travel. And I'm thinking of air travel, particularly. All kinds of, in every place that I've been, there is a responsiveness to those with special needs, various kinds of special needs. So, I think that the opportunities have broadened, and opportunities have reached everyone and there's like a general kind of sensitivity to everyone. The other thing is that that there are also different options for international travel. For example, I said that I didn't do study abroad but now you don't have to take time out in order to do to have an abroad experience you can do it in the summer, you can do it as part of an internship, there are also financial arrangements that you can get access to that would relieve the burden, the financial burden of parents so I think that that it's a lot easier and you just have to go out and find it.

[Pamela] You know for many students, they are not aware of the opportunities out there, particularly if you are low income or first generation or a minority student, you may not always be aware of the opportunities and the ease... My nephew's girlfriend just started doing her degree in Spain and her undergraduate degree as a first-time student and so I wouldn't have even thought that was possible, you know, when I was her age. But how have you seen the number of minority students increase in study abroad? And what do you feel like are some of the barriers, but what are now some of maybe the encouraging signs for minority students?

[Ida] Well, the barriers are always financial and time - time on course. So, it still costs a lot to go to college and one of the things that students with limited means try to do is shorten the time that they have to spend in their curriculum. So, the challenge for both of those is access to

funds and I think that my colleagues spend a lot of time finding external funds to support the college-sponsored study abroad programs. Also, finding opportunities for students in programs that are sponsored by other institutions and other colleges that have financial assistance. So, one of the things that Morehouse has been working hard to do is to design education abroad programs where students can use financial aid and that means scheduling the programs so that they take place, we have a January term program, and the students travel abroad part is during the winter break and then they come back and finish it during on campus during spring semester. So that's one. And there's the other education abroad programs where students do the spring semester and then they finish the program abroad in Ghana - I think we did Ghana and Burkina Faso so that's another way that students can use, their tuition is paid with their financial aid, their financial aid covers the tuition, so they're not paying an extra to tuition for a course that they do abroad. So, they're thinking a very creative ways to allow students to integrate the abroad experience into their regular curriculum and it also keeps a sign that keeps us from having to spend the year abroad junior abroad that maybe you might have to spend another year or from go to summer so that those creative kinds of ways to address opportunities and particularly financial and time challenges are allowing more students to study abroad.

[Pamela] So in your experiences, and we've been talking to different Fulbright-Hays awardee's who are talking about their international and cultural experiences, and through your work at Morehouse and beyond, what have been some of the key things in the realm of global learning that you think need more attention?

[Ida] I think sustainability, certainly sustainability and well, sustainability in the sense of development and development that's not taking aid and then when you're gone, I mean you go and you build a library or school or something and then you go on you still have to pay the teachers and students have to have uniforms and all those things. So, sustainability and that is becoming involved in actions, civic engagement actions that will move whatever group you are involved with from where they are toward where they want to be. And that's not like a one-shot deal where you get the opportunity for civic engagement abroad or for service learning abroad but then you're the only one who benefits from it in the long run. So I think that conceptualizing and planning civic engagement projects abroad within the context of development goals is something that that needs to go into planning education abroad. Another one is leadership, ethical leadership to encourage students to examine leadership around the world. Leadership policies and practices around the world and to think critically about them within the context of the values and ethical principles. I'm not thinking more about Morehouse, because Morehouse pushes that very much, being the alma mater of Martin Luther King Jr. but I think about them in that context and to be able to think critically about them and to offer suggestions for how ethical leadership can be promoted and how one can become an ethical leader with a global perspective.

[Pamela] I think that's really important especially in these day in times. So now we're going to get to a final couple of questions. One is looking back, what would you tell a young researcher like yourself about trying to encourage international education on their campus?

[Ida] First of all, if you're not passionate about it, become passionate about it because when you're passionate it becomes infectious and all everything you do always consider that you're doing it within a world context with the world's view, that's one. The other thing I would say is, don't give up, you'll find some resistance this is because there will be other priorities but always keep your goals in front of you always keep your eyes on the prize and the prize is expanding international education. So those two those are two things I would say.

[Pamela] You know, I would also say to a young researcher look into the Department of Education's Fulbright-Hays programs We have a lot of programs that can help institutions internationalize their campus and bring a global perspective on their campus from undergraduate students, graduates, faculty and to the institutions access, that's just a little plug for our programs. But as you know, and this is the last question, 2021 marks the 60th anniversary of the Fulbright-Hays programs so we're asking all of the podcasts guests what have your Fulbright-Hays experiences meant to you?

[Ida] Those experiences have been like changing. I can't imagine what these years on this planet without the opportunity that the Fulbright-Hays programs have provided me an without the opportunity of knowing the others, you know serving as a reviewer, I got not only to know what I experienced as a as a Fulbright-Hays grantee, but also what all of the others have experienced the young dissertation researchers and a long time ago there also used to faculty researchers and the group projects abroad, so all of those, I can't imagine life without those opportunities. I certainly know there has been enrichment because of Fulbright-Hays that has been awesome, I can't think of a better word, just awesome.

[Pamela] Well, you have been such an inspiration to me and other fellow staff members and thousands of lives that you touched and that little girl who wanted to do something different and study French has gone to leave such a big footprint that those are shoes that will be impossible to fill and we really appreciate everything that you have done in your career and for us and moving the needle internationally so that Americans can understand what is going on abroad and bring that back to help those in our own country. So, you got any fun plans for retirement?

[Ida] I'm waiting for this pandemic to disappear and for travel to be restored to normal so I can finish, you know, I I didn't get to finish my Fulbright to Brazil if it happens next year, I'll be able to do it if not, I'm going to amass some of these frequent flyer miles I haven't been able to use the travel get out of here (laughs)

[Pamela] You and me both. I am going to have to hop on the plane with you (laughs). Thank you so much we appreciate you, you're an inspiration to us all, I think that's the best way to put it you're just an inspiration thank you for your leadership and the graciousness that you have shown us today.

[Ida] Thank you, I'm honored.

[Pamela] As we are, as we are.

[Ida] Take care.

[Outro/Amy] Thanks for listening to the Go Global ED podcast a production of the international and foreign language education office at EU S Department of Education be sure to follow us on Twitter and Go Global ED Podcast and subscribe to our newsletter to learn more about upcoming podcast episodes and receive IFLE updates.