

LUMINATE

A F R I C A J O U R N A L

Where Africa's Challenges Meet Solutions



**SPECIAL FEATURE:
MISSION 300**

A production of The Africa Feature Network

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FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

I welcome you to this inaugural edition of The Africa Feature Network Magazine. It is with great excitement that I present this platform, where stories of transformation and advocacy converge to inspire, inform, and engage. Our mission is to shine a light on Africa's triumphs, challenges, and the dynamic efforts of individuals and communities driving positive change across the continent.

In this edition, you will find a carefully curated selection of features, analyses and thought-provoking narratives that reflect the core values of our network. From governance and human rights to environmental sustainability, wildlife conservation, and youth empowerment, every story has been crafted to highlight not just issues, but also the solutions and actions that shape Africa's future. We aim to provide you with content that resonates, provokes reflection and sparks meaningful conversations.

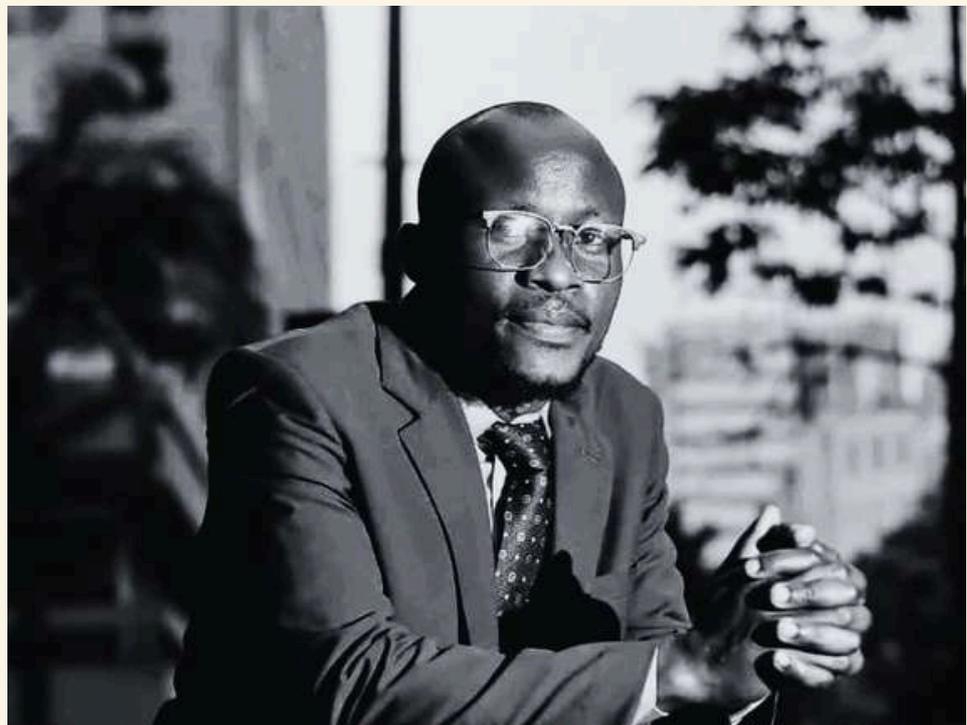
As you explore these pages, I encourage you to engage with the stories, consider their implications, and celebrate the power of storytelling as a tool for social change. It is our hope that this magazine serves not only as a source of information but also as a catalyst for thought, dialogue, and action across our beloved continent.

Thank you for joining us on this journey

Warm regards,

Peter Aowa

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



BOARD OF DIRECTORS CHAIRPERSON'S FOREWORD

Luminate Africa Journal – Inaugural Issue

The launch of Luminare Africa Journal marks a significant milestone in the life of the Africa Feature Network (AFN). This journal is a culmination, a commencement, and an articulation of who we are. It is also a declaration of the future we are committed to shaping as African people.

The AFN was founded on the conviction that Africa's stories, innovations, and solutions must be told by Africans, centered in African realities, and oriented toward African futures. This journal is an extension of that vision. It is a platform where thought leadership meets lived experience, where data converses with culture, and where Africa's challenges are examined not as deficits, but as sites of possibility, ingenuity, and transformation.

This inaugural issue, themed around sustainability, could not be timelier. Sustainability, as presented in these pages, is not reduced to environmental preservation alone, but is explored as a multidimensional commitment that is economic, social, cultural, technological, and ecological. The stories featured here invite us to think deeply about what it means to build systems that endure; systems that nourish communities, protect land and livelihoods, advance equity, and generate shared prosperity across generations.

As the inaugural Board of Directors, it is a profound honor to steward the launch of this journal. To be part of the founding board we carry both responsibility and trust: responsibility to uphold AFN's values of integrity, intellectual rigor, inclusivity, and relevance, and trust to guide an institution whose work speaks to the continent and beyond. This publication represents the Board's collective commitment to knowledge production that is ethical, forward-looking, and anchored in African contexts.

The inaugural Board of Directors brings together diverse experience across strategic governance, editorial and media leadership, gender and social inclusion, trade and African political economy, sustainability, agriculture and food systems, as well as pan-Africa collaboration. This collective expertise has shaped the vision, values, and ethical grounding of this publication, ensuring Africa Feature Network remains both intellectually rigorous and deeply rooted in African realities.

The strength of a board lies in the diversity of insight it brings to governance. Within AFN, expertise across gender, culture, trade, agriculture and food sovereignty is essential. These fields intersect directly with the sustainability agenda and shape how Africa feeds itself, trades with itself and the world, preserves its cultural knowledge, and ensures that development is equitable and just. Sitting at the Board table with this breadth of experience sharpens our oversight, deepens our questions, and grounds our strategic direction in the realities that matter most to African societies.

On behalf of the Board, I extend sincere appreciation to the Editorial Team for their vision, discipline, and intellectual care in producing this inaugural issue. Bringing a publication of this nature to life requires technical skill, commitment to excellence and belief in the power of ideas. We also acknowledge and thank the African changemakers, practitioners, researchers, and storytellers whose contributions form the heart of this journal. Your work is the substance of Africa's unfolding story.

As we look ahead, the Board affirms its commitment to supporting the continued production of Luminare Africa Journal as an annual publication. We invite institutions, partners, private sector actors, development organizations, and individuals who believe in a sustainably transformed Africa to come alongside AFN in this journey through collaboration, sponsorship, thought partnership, and shared vision.

This journal is an invitation: to reflect, engage, innovate and to act. It is our hope that Luminare Africa will continue to be a space where Africa's ideas are documented and mobilized toward a continent that is resilient, just and sustainably transformed.

Dr. Harriet Scott, PhD

Chairperson, Board of Directors

The Africa Feature Network



ADVISORY BOARD CHAIRPERSON'S FOREWORD

The release of the inaugural edition of Luminare Africa Journal takes place at a defining moment for Africa, and for Kenya in particular. Across the continent, citizens are questioning long-standing assumptions about governance, development, and participation. What has often been framed as unrest or disruption is, in reality, a deeper expression of civic awareness and public engagement. It reflects societies in motion, negotiating their future rather than surrendering it.

This edition is shaped by that reality.

As Chairperson of the Advisory Board of The Africa Feature Network, I have observed how Africa is too often discussed through narrow lenses that prioritise crisis over context. Luminare Africa Journal exists to widen that lens. It offers a space for careful reflection on Africa's transitions, grounded in lived experience, evidence, and forward-looking ideas. Not to soften difficult truths, but to place them within the broader arc of growth, reform, and possibility.

Kenya's recent civic awakening reflects a wider continental shift. Africa's youthful populations are no longer passive observers of governance and development. They are informed, connected, and increasingly unwilling to accept systems that exclude them. This is not a threat to stability. It is the foundation of it. Societies that question power, demand accountability, and insist on inclusion are investing in their own long-term resilience.

The contributions in this inaugural edition engage directly with opportunity grounded in responsibility. They examine Africa's human capital, its creative and technological capacity, its natural resources, and its role in shaping global futures. From digital innovation and cultural production to climate stewardship and economic transformation, the journal presents a continent that is not waiting to be rescued, but ready to partner, build, and lead.

At The Africa Feature Network, we believe journalism must do more than record events. It must connect ideas to action, challenges to solutions, and local realities to global conversations. Luminare Africa Journal reflects that belief. It is rooted in constructive journalism that recognises complexity, centres African agency, and advances practical pathways for progress.

This publication also speaks to partnership. Africa's future will not be shaped in isolation, nor through extractive engagement. It will be built through purposeful collaboration that respects people, institutions, and the environment. Kenya's experience, explored within this edition, offers a clear case for why inclusive governance, responsible investment, and civic participation are not obstacles to development, but its strongest foundations.

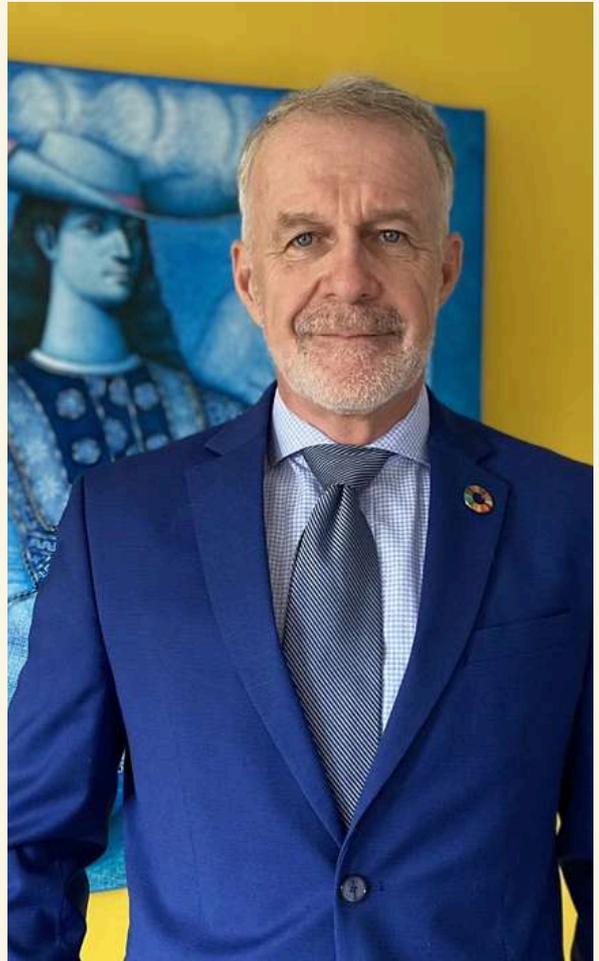
I commend the Editorial Team and contributors whose work has given this inaugural edition its clarity and substance. Their voices affirm that Africa's story is neither singular nor static. It is dynamic, contested, and full of possibility.

As Luminare Africa Journal begins its journey, I hope that it becomes a trusted space for honest reflection, rigorous thought, and meaningful engagement. A journal that does not merely ask what is happening in Africa, but what becomes possible when Africans lead the conversation.

Luc Lapointe

Chairperson, Advisory Board

The Africa Feature Network



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ABOUT THE AFRICA FEATURE NETWORK (AFN)

The Africa Feature Network (AFN) is an advocacy and action network working with communities across Africa and beyond to create meaningful change. We support local initiatives, implement practical solutions to pressing challenges, and combine hands-on action with advocacy and solution-focused journalism. The AFN promotes scalable models that shape policy, strengthen institutions, and drive transformation that reflects the realities of everyday life.



Mission 300: The Roadmap to Bridging Power Gaps in Africa

By Peter Aowa, Nairobi - Kenya



Photos from a site visit to a mini-grid operated by Ignite Energy Access in Petauke, Zambia, provided by The Rockefeller Foundation and Sustainable Energy for All.

The growing energy inequalities across rural and peri-urban Africa, and the silent suffering they continue to impose on families, have become an increasingly urgent concern for leaders attempting to understand why development has stalled in regions that should be thriving. According to UN Sustainable Development Goals, around 600 million Africans still lack reliable access to electricity, which is nearly half the continent's population. Sub-Saharan Africa now carries the heaviest burden of global energy poverty, with the region accounting for 85 percent of the world's population without electricity, a sharp rise from 50 percent in 2010, according to the World Bank Group's Tracking SDG 7– The Energy Progress Report 2025.

It is this widening power gap, where some communities experience steady growth while others remain trapped in cycles of energy poverty, that Andrew Herscovitz, CEO of the Mission 300 Accelerator, has been working to address across multiple global forums. Mission 300, a joint initiative of the World Bank and the African Development Bank, supported by The Rockefeller Foundation, the Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet, and Sustainable Energy for All, aims to confront one of the continent's most persistent barriers to progress: reliable

access to electricity.

In an exclusive interview with Luminate Africa Journal, Herscovitz explained that this very gap became the catalyst for Mission 300's creation, prompting institutions to unite around a bold, community-centred electrification model designed to transform energy access for millions of African households.

In this feature, we explore the steps Mission 300 has taken to address power gaps across Africa, the innovations and partnerships driving progress, and the transformative impact on communities, entrepreneurs, women and youth across the continent.

Andrew Herscowitz believes that the power revolution in Africa is the most effective approach to transforming the continent through modern agriculture, manufacturing and technological tools like Artificial Intelligence (AI).

“Mission 300 fuels small businesses, enables modern agriculture and manufacturing, and equips young people with the tools, including AI access, to seize emerging opportunities,” he said, adding that the initiative is driving inclusive growth for Africa’s expanding population.



Andrew Herscowitz, the CEO of Mission 300 Accelerator

Bridging the Energy Divide

The challenges of energy inequality are stark. In Zambia, for instance, rural electricity access had long lagged behind urban centres, leaving families reliant on kerosene lamps or diesel generators. Schools could only operate during daylight, health facilities struggled to run basic diagnostic equipment and small businesses faced prohibitive energy costs. Mission 300 approached this problem not as a technical gap but as a structural challenge demanding coordinated action.

In the Petauke District of Eastern Zambia, mini-grid projects now power hundreds of homes and businesses. The Tembo family, who previously depended on diesel generators, now operates two sunflower oil extractors using renewable electricity. This shift cut operating costs by nearly two-thirds and enabled expansion, creating jobs and increasing local agricultural output.

According to the World Bank report on Progress of Mission 300, Tanzania illustrates a similar story. Over 5.7 million people have gained access to electricity since Mission 300 projects began, with an additional 6.25 million expected by 2030. Farmers now use electrically powered irrigation, increasing yields and reducing vulnerability to drought. Health clinics operate continuously, storing vaccines and running essential medical equipment. Small manufacturers, previously limited by power outages, now produce consumer goods and agro-processed products for regional markets.

The report further established that in Côte d’Ivoire, Mission 300 has connected 2.2 million people, with another 1.6 million projected by 2030. The access to electricity has enabled small enterprises to expand, improved community health outcomes, and created pathways for youth engagement in local economies. The focus on distributed renewable energy, including mini-grids and stand-alone solar systems, ensures that even remote communities gain sustainable power while private operators provide maintenance and management.

Mission 300 places strong emphasis on human capital, particularly through youth and women-led initiatives. The Mission 300 Fellowship, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, is a two-year program deploying early-to mid-career Africans to Compact Delivery and Monitoring Units in participating countries. From over 3,000 applicants, 22 candidates were shortlisted from 15 countries. Six are already deployed in Lesotho, Niger, Chad, Mauritania, Burundi and Senegal, supporting governments in implementing National Energy Compacts and up to 11 more are expected to deploy by early next year.

Hope Mriti, an ODI fellow based in Lesotho, explained the significance of the fellowship, noting that it provides a platform that contributes to national electrification by transferring skills intergenerationally.



“

Africa has a youthful population and this is already seen in the ODI Mission 300 Fellowship, where we have amazing, talented youth do amazing things in their countries. So we can already see this talent, this capability. And what the Mission 300 fellowship seeks to do is to amplify the already existing talent in the youth and give them a platform where they can work, interact and contribute to the electrification of the nation.”

Said Mriti, noting that it is important to bring the youth on board to ensure the sustainability and inter-generational transfer of skills, so that the baton is passed from the older generation to the younger, not excluding them but also having room for collaboration.

Youth and women have also been central in using electricity for technological innovation. Training centers powered by mini-grids now offer coding and AI classes, digital literacy programs and entrepreneurship support. These initiatives create pathways for young people to engage in knowledge-based economies, ensuring that electrification contributes to both economic growth and skill development.

Photos from a site visit to a mini-grid operated by Ignite Energy Access in Petauke, Zambia, provided by The Rockefeller Foundation and Sustainable Energy for All.

The scale of Mission 300 is underpinned by strategic partnerships across governments, private sector actors, philanthropies and development institutions. The Global Energy Alliance has committed \$12 million to support distributed renewable energy companies to gain access to technical assistance, results-based financing and equipment aggregation services in key Mission 300 countries, including Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Madagascar.

In Zambia, the Energy Demand Stimulation Incentive (ZEDSI), launched with SEforALL and supported by the Rockefeller Foundation, links electricity supply to consumption by providing performance-based grants to mini-grid operators. This mechanism ensures sustainability while encouraging local communities to maximize productive energy use.

National Energy Compacts have been central to Mission 300's approach. By committing to policy reforms, investment planning, and improved governance structures, governments create an environment conducive to private investment. Thirty countries across Africa are now advancing these compacts, ensuring that electrification is accompanied by systemic sector reform.

Andrew Herscowitz emphasized the importance of these collaborations, terming them critical in the Mission 300 power goal.

“Our partnerships with governments, the private sector, development institutions, and philanthropies have been central to Mission 300’s progress. Together, we are delivering affordable power, improving utility efficiency, attracting private investment, and ensuring reliable and sustainable electricity access.”

Andrew noted that the mission’s technical and staffing support to African governments has been essential to ensuring that government. Can succeed in achieving the ambitious goals they committed to achieving on their National Energy Compacts.

Through these partnerships, Mission 300 has mobilized over \$50 billion in financing, allowing more than 150



projects to advance across 40 countries. These collaborations have accelerated project timelines, improved reliability of energy delivery and enabled large-scale deployment of distributed renewable energy solutions.

Mission 300 has already connected 32 million people in 39 countries, with the target to reach nearly 250 million more through World Bank projects and 50 million through African Development Bank initiatives by 2030. Distributed renewable energy deployment is estimated to generate 1.7 million direct jobs annually, including installers, electricians and small enterprise operators, with millions more benefiting indirectly through education, healthcare and local businesses.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) the Mwinda Fund, supported by the Global Energy Alliance, provides technical assistance and results-based financing to mini-grid operators.

In Tanzania, small manufacturers and local enterprises have reported revenue increases of 40 to 60 percent within a year of gaining electricity access.

Monitoring mechanisms embedded within Mission 300 ensure accountability and track progress. Compact Delivery and Monitoring Units report on compact implementation & electrification progress as well as unstick bottlenecks that drive implementation of Mission 300 in the country.

Energy consumption, infrastructure performance, job creation and community engagement with compact implementation and electrification progress as well as unstick bottlenecks that drive implementation.

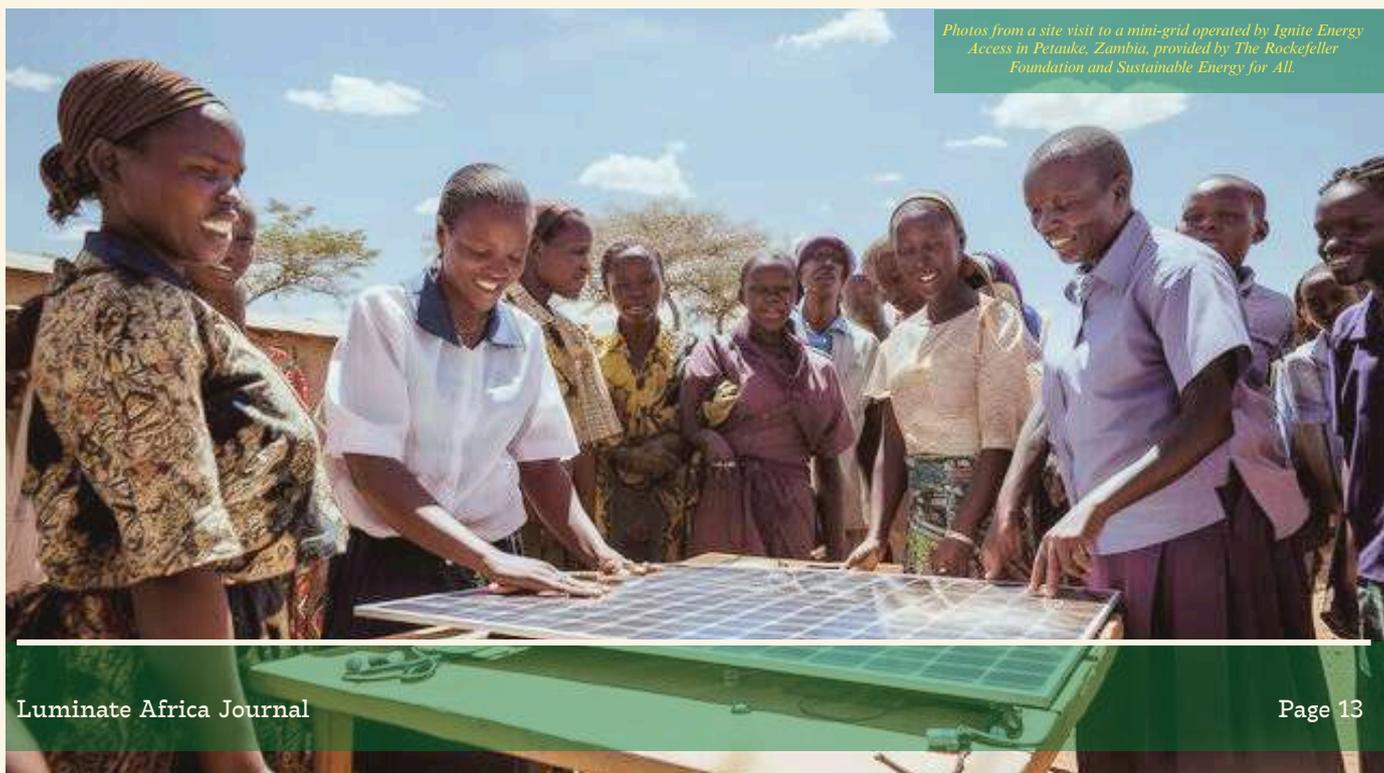
These systems provide governments, investors and development partners with data-driven insights, enabling adaptive management and targeted interventions to improve outcomes.

The integration of electricity into productive use has had far-reaching effects. Farmers diversify crops, improve food security and expand into agro-processing. Schools increase student retention and improve educational outcomes. Health facilities reduce preventable mortality by keeping equipment running and storing essential medications. Local entrepreneurs grow businesses that were previously unsustainable due to lack of reliable power. These changes are creating ripple effects across communities, strengthening social cohesion and fostering economic resilience.

Mission 300 represents more than an energy initiative. It is a transformation engine for Africa. By addressing energy inequality, empowering youth and women, fostering innovation, and building partnerships across sectors, the program demonstrates how access to electricity can reshape the development trajectory of entire regions. From rural Zambia to Niger, Mauritania, DRC, and Côte d'Ivoire, the impacts are measurable, profound, and scalable.

The Mission is establishing a model for sustainable electrification that prioritizes economic productivity and social inclusion by combining infrastructure, human capital development, and policy reforms.

Photos from a site visit to a mini-grid operated by Ignite Energy Access in Petauke, Zambia, provided by The Rockefeller Foundation and Sustainable Energy for All.



INSIDE AFRICA'S VISION 2063: Where Is the Continent Headed?



By Peter Aowa, Nairobi – Kenya

When African heads of state gathered in Addis Ababa in May 2013 to celebrate 50 years since the founding of the Organisation of African Unity, now the African Union, their eyes were fixed on the future.

The Dr Nkosazana Clarice Dlamini-Zuma-led meeting was not about nostalgia but reimagining Africa's place in the world. Out of those reflections came the Africa Agenda 2063, a continental vision for a peaceful, prosperous and self-reliant Africa. Two years later, in 2015, the African Union adopted it as the guiding framework for the continent's long-term development.

Agenda 2063 was born from an honest look at Africa's past failures since independence. Previous frameworks like the Lagos Plan of Action and the New Partnership for Africa's Development had produced limited results, with most

elying heavily on donors while lacking coordination. African leaders wanted a vision owned and driven by Africans themselves. Agenda 2063 became that promise — a roadmap built on Pan-Africanism, unity and sustainable development. It sought to create an Africa that could speak for itself, trade with itself and depend on its own capacity to grow. Speaking at the 2013 golden jubilee of the African Union, then Chairperson of the AU Commission, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, said that the agenda was not a dream but a practical expression of Africa's collective will.

“Agenda 2063 is our blueprint for transforming Africa into a global powerhouse of the future. It is not a dream; it is the practical expression of our collective will,” she said.



North-South highway in Medea, Algeria. // Photo: AFP/NurPhoto

Zuma's words captured the determination behind the vision and the desire to break the pattern of dependency that had defined much of the continent's post-colonial era.

The architects of Agenda 2063 noted that the goal was to ensure the continent would not just survive but thrive a hundred years after the independence movements. To achieve that, they outlined seven key aspirations, including inclusive prosperity, continental unity, good governance, peace and security, cultural pride, people-driven

development and a strong voice for Africa on the global stage.

A decade later, the question is not whether the vision still matters but how far Africa has moved toward realizing it. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) stands out as one of the most significant steps taken so far. Trading officially began in 2021, creating the world's largest single market by number of countries. It aims to remove tariffs on 90% of goods and promote intra-African trade. Countries like Ghana and Rwanda are already positioning themselves as manufacturing and logistics hubs, tapping into regional supply chains to export textiles, food products and technology components.

Former Ghanaian President Nana Akufo-Addo, at the AfCFTA Secretariat launch in Accra, reminded the continent that the success of the free trade area would depend on Africa's political will and the speed of implementation. Nana argued that it was time for Africans to trade more with one another and add value to what they produce. His message echoed the practical spirit of Agenda 2063 — action over aspiration.

Transport and energy have also seen notable progress. Ethiopia's Addis Ababa to Djibouti electric railway, operational since 2018, has become the backbone of the country's export trade, cutting freight time to the port from days to hours. Kenya's Standard Gauge Railway links Mombasa to Naivasha, easing domestic cargo movement and stimulating industrial growth along the corridor. Although there is no operational railway between Kenya and Ethiopia yet, the Lamu Port–South Sudan–Ethiopia Transport Corridor plans to create that connection in the future.

In West Africa, Nigeria's massive Dangote Refinery, inaugurated in 2023, reflects the broader continental ambition for industrial self-reliance. Once fully operational, it is expected to meet the country's fuel needs and export refined petroleum to neighbouring nations, reducing Africa's dependence on imported fuels. Similar mega-projects like Tanzania's Julius Nyerere Hydropower Station highlight the growing regional effort to align national infrastructure with continental goals.

Energy transformation remains one of Africa's most visible success stories. Kenya now generates about 90% of its electricity from renewable sources, mainly geothermal, hydro and wind, while Morocco's Noor Solar Complex and Egypt's Benban Solar Park have become continental models for large-scale clean power. These projects are reshaping Africa's industrial capacity by providing stable and affordable energy. Across the continent, governments are also experimenting with mini-grid systems that bring solar power to rural areas, narrowing the gap between urban and rural electrification.

Beyond national achievements, Agenda 2063 also envisions bold continental projects that symbolize Africa's shared ambition for transformation. The Grand Inga Dam in the Democratic Republic of Congo, projected to generate over 40,000 megawatts of clean energy, stands out as a defining effort to power the continent through renewable energy. Alongside it, the Integrated High-Speed Train Network aims to link major African capitals and commercial hubs — from Cairo to Cape Town and Dakar to Lagos — creating a seamless transport system that drives trade, tourism and unity.

The African Passport and Free Movement of People, Single African Air Transport Market and Silencing the Guns by 2030 initiative reflect Africa's determination to foster integration, mobility, and peace. Together with the Pan-African E-Network and the African Virtual and E-University, these initiatives illustrate how Agenda 2063 reaches beyond borders, connecting economies, citizens and institutions toward one vision of a prosperous, stable and self-reliant continent.

Agriculture, which is a key driver of Africa's economy, is gradually shifting from subsistence to agribusiness. Under the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme, countries such as Ghana, Malawi, and Senegal have expanded irrigation, improved seed technology, and invested in agro-processing. These changes are helping countries reduce food imports and build resilience against climate shocks. In Kenya's Rift Valley, young entrepreneurs are embracing smart-farming technologies that use drones and digital apps to monitor soil and rainfall patterns, illustrating the new face of African farming.

Socially, progress in inclusion is becoming clearer. The African Union Gender Scorecard shows women now hold an average of 26% of parliamentary seats across Africa, surpassing the global average. Rwanda remains a global leader with more than 60% representation in parliament, while Namibia, Senegal, and South Africa continue to strengthen gender equity laws. At the same time, the African Youth Charter has expanded opportunities for young people to participate in governance, innovation, and policy-making. The rise of youth-led innovation hubs in cities like Nairobi, Accra, and Kigali signals an awakening generation that is redefining what development looks like in their own communities.



The Gautrain, Africa's first high-speed rail line, in Pretoria, South Africa // Photo: courtesy

Health cooperation has deepened through the creation of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention and the African Medicines Agency, which help strengthen public health systems and reduce dependence on external actors. Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic have pushed African nations to invest more in regional vaccine production and supply-chain capacity. In South Africa and Senegal, new facilities are already being built to produce mRNA vaccines, while countries like Egypt and Rwanda are expanding biomedical research and diagnostics.

The African Development Bank and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa report that growth across the continent averaged around 4% between 2014 and 2019. Though below the ambitious targets of Agenda 2063, this performance reflected steady resilience before the pandemic disrupted progress. Poverty rates declined slightly, while youth entrepreneurship and digital startups multiplied in cities like Nairobi, Lagos, and Kigali. In most countries in Africa, mobile technology is reshaping commerce, with fintech platforms like M-Pesa and Flutterwave providing millions of people with access to credit, savings, and payments.



Delegates attend an Agenda 2063 conference during the African Union Summit, February 16, 2025. // Photo: courtesy

Still, challenges persist. Industrial transformation remains slow, as most exports are still dominated by unprocessed raw materials. Conflict continues to threaten parts of the Sahel, Sudan, and eastern Congo. Political instability, governance deficits, and corruption have also undermined collective efforts. Funding gaps limit how fast the agenda can move, as many projects depend on external financing. Climate change adds another layer of uncertainty, drying farmlands and displacing communities, especially in the Horn of Africa. Yet these limitations have not erased the growing momentum of African-driven initiatives.

The next phase of Agenda 2063, the Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan running from 2024 to 2033, is shifting attention toward industrialization, digital transformation, and climate resilience. It calls for stronger institutions, better coordination between governments and private sectors, and homegrown innovation. Many African governments are already embedding these principles into their national development plans. The African Union has also introduced a performance-tracking dashboard to monitor progress across all member states, ensuring accountability and consistency.

Senegal's President Macky Sall, during his term as AU Chairperson, emphasized that Agenda 2063 was not only a vision but a contract with the African people. Sall challenged the African countries to move with purpose towards the goal.

Agenda 2063 remains a living vision even in the wake of financial constraints. The progress witnessed in factories powered by clean energy, the insurgence of youth-led innovations, and the surge of women in leadership reflect a continent on the move. Africa's journey toward 2063 may be uneven, but its direction is unmistakably forward. The challenge for the next generation of African leaders is to sustain this momentum, turn policy promises into tangible results, and prove that the dream conceived in Addis Ababa in 2013 was not a mere rhetoric but a continental rebirth in motion.



**CAMEROONIAN ROYAL
SCIENTIST PROF. WILFRED
MBACHAM ON A MISSION TO A**
**Malaria-Free
Africa**

By Akere-Maimo J. Ano-Ebie,
Yaounde, Cameroon

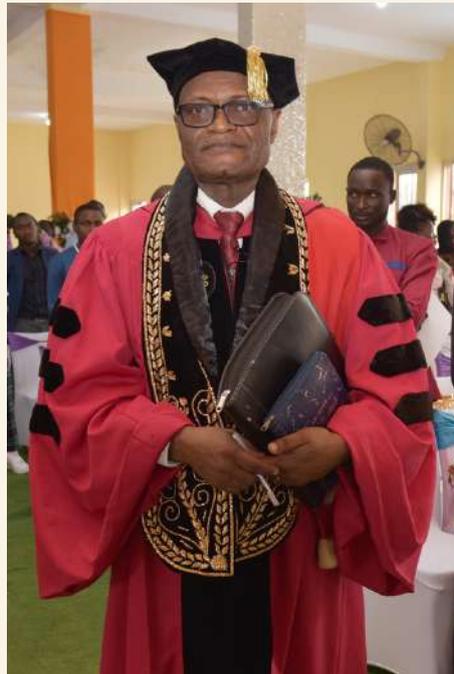
A traditional ruler and a Harvard-trained scientist, Prof. Mbacham is not just studying the problem; he is shaping the scientific and strategic path toward malaria elimination in Cameroon and Africa.



Malaria, a serious Mosquito-borne parasitic disease, remains a serious socio-economic burden for Africa, claiming the life of a child under five nearly every minute. The World Health Organization's (WHO) 2024 report paints a stark picture: the African Region shoulders the world's heaviest malaria burden, with 94% of global cases and 95% of deaths, approximately 246 million cases and 5,690,000 deaths. In Cameroon, the challenge is particularly acute, with the entire population at risk and the disease accounting for over 12% of all medical consultations, making it a leading cause of mortality and morbidity.

Yet, in the face of these daunting numbers, a powerful counter-narrative is emerging. It is led by a man who wears both a lab coat and a royal crown: HRH Professor Wilfred Fon Mbacham. A traditional ruler and a Harvard-trained scientist, Prof. Mbacham is not just studying the problem; he is shaping the scientific and strategic path toward malaria elimination in Cameroon and Africa.

As a Titular Professor of Public Health Biotechnology at the University of Yaoundé I, Prof. Mbacham's research has been instrumental in redefining the fight against malaria. His work at LAPHER-Biotech has directly addressed two of the



Prof. Wilfred Mbacham// Photo: courtesy

most significant threats to malaria control: drug resistance and diagnostic accuracy.

His pioneering research on the Pfcrt and Pfmdr1 genetic markers provided the foundational evidence for understanding and tracking chloroquine resistance in *Plasmodium falciparum*. This research directly informed Cameroon's national drug policy shift to Artemisinin-based Combination Therapies (ACTs); a move critical to maintaining treatment efficacy. As a result, Cameroon has contributed to regional efforts that have seen ACT coverage in children under five in West and Central Africa rise from 1% in 2010 to over 30% today, saving countless lives.

His work validating Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR)-based diagnosis for vulnerable groups,

such as pregnant women, has been crucial for improving surveillance and ensuring targeted treatment. Enhanced diagnostic precision underpins the "test-before-treat" policy, helping reduce unnecessary drug use and slow the emergence of resistance.

Prof. Mbacham's influence extends from the molecular level to global health governance. As Chair of the Board of Trustees for the UK-based Malaria Consortium, he leads organization that implements life-saving interventions across Africa, focusing on community-based management and strengthening health systems. Under his guidance, Long Lasting Insecticidal Nets (LLINs) distribution campaigns have reached over 90% of households in targeted districts in Cameroon.

His previous roles coordinating the Antimalarial Drug Resistance Network at WHO/TDR and chairing the IAEA's African Regional Cooperative Agreement (AFRA) have been pivotal in creating a coordinated, data-driven African response. These efforts foster Pan-African collaboration necessary to track cross-border resistance and implement harmonized treatment protocols, contributing directly to malaria control gains.



Perhaps his most enduring legacy is his work building institutional frameworks for African scientific independence. He developed the “Pro-P.A.S.T.E.U.R.” philosophy, integrating science, education, and innovation. This vision materializes in his brainchild, the Fobang Institutes for Innovation in Science & Technology (FINISTECH), which trains the next generation of African problem-solvers.

As Chair of Cameroon’s National Ethics Committee for Research Involving Humans, Prof. Mbacham has been instrumental in developing the ethical framework that enabled the successful rollout of new tools.

His leadership was significant in building trust and regulatory oversight for Cameroon to become one of the first countries to launch the Routine Childhood Malaria Vaccination Program with the RTS’s vaccine in 2024. He frames this milestone not just as a medical breakthrough, but as a catalyst for human potential, noting that preventing recurrent malaria in children directly improves cognitive development and educational outcomes.

HRH Prof. Wilfred Fon Mbacham embodies a transformative model of leadership and one of the rare figures who can decode a parasite’s genome and command the respect of village elders, ensuring that global strategies are grounded in local realities.

His career offers a clear blueprint for how Africa can confront its health challenges by investing in its scientists, building its institutions and leading with ethical rigour and scientific excellence.

In a landscape often defined by daunting statistics, Prof. Mbacham’s work is a testament to the impact of one individual bridging worlds. He is not merely responding to the malaria crisis but also actively redesigning the fight, ensuring that the next decade’s data tells a story of African-led success.

ARDENT KENYAN BIKER AND 'ONE PEOPLE AFRICA' RIDE OVER 16000KM FOR A VISA-FREE AFRICA

BY ERICK OUNDAH, SOUTH AFRICA



Image source: [Central News SA](#)

Visa rejection, visa revocation, or delays of approval resulting from bureaucratic procedures can be daunting. Every day, nationals, both local and foreign, throng immigration departments seeking approval for their travels. It is a process often defined by hurdles. The high costs of visa approval and cumbersome immigration procedures have adversely affected cross-border travel, particularly in Africa. With unnoticeable technological advancements to automate services, customer service has been a nightmare. To preserve Africa's potential socioeconomic prowess, private bodies have stepped up to change the status quo.

With a vision of a united Africa beyond colonial boundaries, One People Africa, a South African-based organisation under the leadership of its founder, Masilo Mafa, partnered with its Kenyan-based ambassador, Mustapha Konvict, to address visa-related challenges that have stifled Africa's socioeconomic potential. The One People Africa's 2025 tour, which covered over 9 countries and a whopping 16000km+ on two wheels, was a demonstration of the zeal of a dream so dear to Africans' hearts.

“We aim to bring a Visa-less Africa because there is no need for an African to apply for a Visa to go to Africa. Complicated visa processes are hindrances to brotherhood spirit.”

“I have ever spent ungodly hours at the border post waiting to be processed, and I know how frustrating it can be”, a melancholic confession from Masilo, that unearthed the ordeals that travellers undergo at border posts and immigration departments to get a visa.

It is midday, and a Kenyan biker under the alias name Mustapha Konvict is embarking on a transformative journey to champion a visa-free Africa. Mombasa bikers have ridden all the way to Kenya’s capital, Nairobi, to join other bikers in flagging off Konvict.

In the recent past, activities around biking have flourished in Kenya. This time, Kenyan bikers, in a camaraderie spirit, geared up, ready to convoy Mustapha to the Namanga border, to cross into Tanzania in a rush to beat the set 9-day travel deadline to Africa’s southernmost part. Partnering with a South African-based organisation, “One People Africa”, the team is seeking to push for the elimination of visa barriers across the continent.



One People Africa reception party!! Photo: Courtesy



Out and about in Ezulwini valley en route to the Umhlanga-Reed dance. Pictured from left: Lihle Mhlanga, Masilo Mafa and Mustapha Konvict!! Photo: Courtesy

For decades, Africa has been grappling with economic and logistical hurdles, often caused by stringent visa requirements. The organisers and participants of the visa-free Africa initiative are on a mission to showcase the urgent need for a widened intra-African connection and unity among Africans.

“We aim to bring a Visa-less Africa because there is no need for an African to apply for a Visa to go to Africa. Complicated visa processes are hindrances to brotherhood spirit,” said Mustapha

Matters related to visa processes fall under the purview of immigration. This time, a people-centred approach initiated by the people is brewing, calling the African governments to fast-track the process.

“We also have a collaboration with visual artists to paint art murals across the continent, art being an effective tool of communication”, said Masilo, who reiterated that closed borders bolster weak partnerships and a fragmented Africa, which do not bode well with socio-economic transformation and development.



Masilo Mafa President One People Africa poses with Mustapha Konvict// Photo: Courtesy

Borderless Africa is a shared dream that most African leaders have continually preached. During the 24th COMESA summit of Heads of State at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre (KICC) in Nairobi, President William Ruto reiterated the need for open borders.

“By opening our borders, we aim to facilitate the free movement of people, the free movement of goods and services across the continent, a cornerstone for shared prosperity. Kenya has taken the initiative to become “visa-free” for most Africans, stated Ruto, whose sentiments were echoed by Zimbabwe’s Emerson Mnangagwa.

“We need to remove the remaining barriers to African trade, barriers to investment. Our people, particularly the youths who embody the future of our region, expect and deserve a COMESA that offers them an opportunity for innovation and prosperity”, affirmed Mnangagwa.

To make a reality the dream of a united Africa, action had to be taken, an action louder than words.

One man, two wheels and one mission; championing a Visa-less Africa. Ready to traverse 9 countries to the southernmost part of the African continent on a two-wheeled BMW GS 1200cc, Mustapha Konvict was unbowed. From Kenya to Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Eswatini, South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho and back, the journey was marked with a fair share of good and awful experiences at the subsequent border posts.

As an ardent rider, Konvict embarked on this trip for the second time, having conquered this route in April 2024. Unlike his first trip, where the focus was on fulfilling the spirit of adventure, this time, Mustapha was on a mission—a mission to preach the gospel of visa-free Africa, devoid of bottlenecks that hinder cross-border movement.

In 2024, Kenya introduced a “visa-free” policy that required visitors to complete an online application before leaving their countries of origin. Later, an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) was introduced to replace visa requirements for all visitors. The move to allow citizens

citizens of nearly all African countries and other countries outside the African continent to visit without prior authorisation elicited mixed reactions back in Kenya.

Critics challenged President Ruto’s directive to scrap stringent visa policies across the Kenyan borders, which were aimed at detecting and eliminating security threats. This begs the question: could a visa-free policy propagate insecurity within the continent?

“We Africans, our destinies are tied together. However, this should not be misconstrued as a call for unchecked and unregulated movement of people across borders. This is why we are wary of using the phrase ‘borderless Africa’. We would much prefer a ‘Visaless Africa’. The two are not synonymous and imply different things. Countries need to protect and retain their territorial integrity for safety and security reasons. However, the ease and convenience of travel across the continent should be the ambition and priority of all”, clarified Masilo

In what seemed to address the voiced

insecurity concerns tied to the new visa policy, Kenya dropped the ETA requirement for all African countries except Libya and Somalia, where insecurity has been rampant.

At the beginning of 2025, Ghana opened its borders to all African passport holders. Other African nations that granted full visa-free access are: Benin, Gambia, Rwanda and Seychelles. On the other end, Botswana, Burundi, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Mauritius, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Burkina Faso, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Eritrea, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan and Togo are visa-free or may require a visa-on-arrival (VOA).

With most African states shifting to a visa-free status, bureaucratic procedures across African borders are still a nuisance to frequent cross-border travellers, hence One People Africa's inaugural campaign, pushing the entire leadership of Africa to be intentional about the visa-free policy, as they claim that some policies are on paper but not in practice.

"We want to build a forward-looking community of Africans, creatives, changemakers and leaders. We can build a better Africa and environment for all of us through genuine connections and committed efforts", said Masilo

The ride through scenic Africa is an experiential one. It is a ride of purpose with too huge a price, open borders.

"Some of the issues we are fighting are hefty visa charges. Imagine I was charged 150 USD at the Zambian border posts," said Konvict.

Mustapha's ride through the Zimbabwean border was smooth. On his previous trip, the clearance process was marred with delays. It is a kind of advancement that, according to Mustapha, should be emulated across the continent.

"Zimbabwe's border is modernised, and everything is processed online, something many borders still lack", said Mustapha.

The One People Africa team is ready to receive Mustapha at the South African border, then proceed to Polokwane for a public gathering. Chivhu to Polokwane, a 650km ride, will definitely be an easy task for Mr Konvict, considering the already conquered terrain.

In the company of brother Effort Ruzvidzo, they set out for a 150km ride to Masvingo, where they part ways after breakfast. A solo ride starts from Masvingo, with the better part of the road under construction. This regrettably lags his speed.

"The off-road section was brutal. At one point, I thought I'd outsmart the road and took a smooth stretch that lasted 15km — only to find a huge sign: "ROAD CLOSED". I had cooked myself," recounts Mustapha.

Mustapha is forced to ride all the way back to join the rough road. Finally, he wraps up the 150-kilometre rocky terrain with a much-needed 30-minute break before advancing to the Zimbabwe-South Africa border. At the border, the clearance process is seamless.

"What a surprise! Zimbabwe has stepped up. The process is fully digital: QR codes, big display screens, and clear instructions. I was cleared in just 5 minutes," says Mustapha



Masilo Mafa President One People Africa poses with Lilhe Mhlanga and Mustapha Konvict// Photo: Courtesy

The majority of Africa's infrastructural development can be attributed to benchmarking. During Mashujaa Day Celebrations in Kenya, Senegal's Bassirou Diomaye Faye and Kenya's William Ruto agreed to a visa waiver allowing Citizens of the two countries to travel visa-free for up to 90 days. The two heads of state also agreed to work together for the success of the 2027 Africa Cup of Nations. This presents an opportunity of great impact, considering Senegal's stellar record in football. Africa's growth is undoubtedly dependent on continental collaboration.

Meanwhile, the One People Africa team patiently waited at the South African border to receive their highly anticipated Kenyan ambassador, Mustapha Konvict.

"The journey continues to Swaziland, where I'll be welcomed once again. The mission to make Africa visa-free is stronger than ever. We will win this" Said Mustapha

"We want to see more Africans travelling and exploring Africa, and more trade amongst Africans. It is in the best interest of all of us to ensure that we all thrive, and we will be powerful when we come together" Said Masilo

"We are also looking to work with stakeholders in government, art councils, tourism bodies, agencies and associations, counties and municipalities, embassies and art organizations in this project" He added.

,On October 11, 2025, Mustapha arrived in Kenya after spending over Kshs 800,000 to fund the two-way journey. In a briefing with Africa Feature Network on 18/11/2025, One People Africa shared a glimpse of what to expect in 2026.

"We are currently planning a possible tour of West Africa for 2026. Another project in development is the One People Africa festival in Nairobi. We will share more details on Facebook: One People Africa and Instagram: onepeople_africa", said Masilo.

With plans anticipated to be more robust and engaging in the future, private bikers have been urged to be part of the dream.

"The biking community must go international for good deeds, and we are not locking anyone out, whether you ride a 100cc or 1300cc; we must work as a team, and we are soon making a call," said Mustapha

DR. ISAAC KINITY: KENYAN-BORN, US-BASED HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST ON 35 YEARS OF ACTIVISM



By Erick Oundah, Nairobi, Kenya

For more than 35 years, Dr. Isaac Kinity has carried this mission through threats, illness, exile, and isolation. He has chosen to speak when silence would have been easier and far safer.

“I almost paid the price with my own life.” Kenyan-born, US-based human rights activist Dr. Isaac Kinity recalls his narrow escape to Uganda after calling out the government for corruption and the abuse of Kenya’s civil servants during the administration of former President Daniel Moi.

Dr. Kinity’s confrontation with the state unfolded during one of Kenya’s most repressive political periods, when civil servants, trade unionists, and government critics were routinely intimidated, detained, or silenced. Challenging corruption and the abuse of public workers under the Moi administration carried real and immediate danger, yet it was a risk he chose to take.

That resolve was shaped long before he entered public life. Dr. Kinity grew up on the forested slopes of Mau, at the Nessuit Forest Station, in a disciplined Christian household. “We grew up disciplined. Respect for elders was not optional,” he recalls. From an early age, he observed ordinary families struggle under policies that protected the powerful while leaving workers exposed and voiceless.

School life reflected the same culture of fear. Corporal punishment was common, and authority was rarely questioned. Those beatings, Kinity says, made them fear the teachers more than they loved school. While painful, those experiences hardened him. They taught him

endurance, patience, and the importance of standing up for others — traits that would later define his activism.

His entry into organized activism came through the Kenya Civil Servants Union, once the country’s largest labour movement. By 1980, the union owned more than 1,000 flats in Nairobi and operated dozens of canteens within government offices. It was financially strong and widely respected. That power, however, attracted political hostility.

Through a presidential decree, President Moi invalidated the union and seized all its assets. When efforts to revive the union began, Dr. Kinity emerged as Secretary General. He openly demanded the return of property taken from workers and questioned the legality of the government’s actions. In the political climate of the time, such defiance was considered subversive.

In September 1992, Dr. Kinity received a summons from the Special Branch in Nakuru, signed by officers Nyambane and Okumu. The message signaled heightened surveillance and an escalation of state pressure. The warnings soon turned into direct retaliation.

He received repeated threats and later survived what he believes was a deliberate poisoning. His health deteriorated

rapidly. He suffered partial paralysis, vision complications, kidney and bladder infections, severe vein damage, and a collapsed immune system. “I was dying in pieces,” he said. He attributes his survival to faith. “God did not forsake me. He protected me because he had a mission for me.”

As his health failed, security operatives intensified their pursuit. His home was raided repeatedly, and members of his family were harassed and assaulted during searches meant to locate him. The attacks on his family marked a turning point. Remaining in Kenya, he concluded, would endanger lives beyond his own.

Still weak and barely recovering, he fled to Uganda with the help of trusted contacts who understood the gravity of the threat he faced. He lived in hiding, moving between safe locations while quietly pursuing asylum. For two years, Uganda became a place of survival rather than safety, as arrangements were made for him and his family to leave Africa altogether.

In 2000, Dr. Kinity and his family were resettled in New Haven, United States, as refugees through Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services. At Yale New Haven Hospital, he received specialized medical care that stabilized the long-term complications caused by the poisoning and ultimately saved his life.

Being a passionate human rights defender and a believer of good governance, Kinity carried on with his activism while in exile. He continued to document corruption and human rights abuses in Kenya, writing directly to global leaders and institutions. In 2005, he wrote to President George W. Bush and several United States senators on the privatization of Social Security, later receiving a formal response from the White House acknowledging his concerns. His advocacy work also extended to Native American women facing domestic violence, earning recognition from Amnesty International USA.

Beyond policy and advocacy, he became actively involved in helping vulnerable Kenyans abroad. In one of the recent cases, a group of Kenyan women in the United States had been defrauded by a fellow Kenyan and faced deportation due to lack of documentation. Working with Kenyan clergy, he successfully intervened, leading to the suspension of deportation, prosecution of the offender, and recovery of the women’s losses.

In another recent case, he helped reunite a Kenyan woman in Saudi Arabia with her daughter after the family lost contact with her and failed to receive assistance through official diplomatic channels.

In recent years, Dr. Kinity’s consistent advocacy has renewed public interest in Kenya with a growing number of citizens urging him to consider running for the presidency in the 2027 general elections — a call he does not dismiss.

“If I ever run,” he said, “my priority will be to eliminate corruption, feed the hungry, support widows and orphans, care for the elderly, and create opportunities for our youth and farmers.”

He believes corruption remains Kenya’s greatest enemy and argues that eliminating it would unlock progress across all sectors, from food security and infrastructure to healthcare and public welfare. These convictions, he says, are rooted in the values instilled during his early life: honesty, courage, and sacrifice.

For more than 35 years, Dr. Isaac Kinity has carried this mission through threats, illness, exile, and isolation. He has chosen to speak when silence would have been easier and far safer.

Kinity who currently lives in Connecticut has been following developments in Kenya closely while passionately taking on the government to fight for good governance and protection for human rights.



Dr. Isaac Kinity (in black coat) shortly after a press conference in Nairobi //Photo: Courtesy

STRENGTHENING DEVOLUTION: HOW EACOR IS ADVANCING DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL KENYA

BY POLYCARP OCHIENG, MOMBASA - KENYA

Kenya's 2010 Constitution introduced devolution, which created 47 county governments. The 47 counties fund projects that fall within their purview with their own source revenue and support from the national government. This constitutional reform was aimed at devolving administrative functions. The old system was marred with issues ranging from marginalisation to skewed development. At least 15% of the national revenue was allocated for county governments.

Since 2013, over 3.8 trillion Kenyan shillings have been disbursed to counties. The road network, healthcare, water and sanitation projects and early childhood education have improved. Previously neglected regions such as the Coast and North-Eastern have recorded tremendous improvement.

Politically, devolution has significantly lowered the stakes of presidential elections by giving every community control over local resources and power, thereby easing ethnic tensions. This problem dominated the centralised system of governance.

Despite the tremendous development that counties have recorded since the inception of devolution, Kenyans in rural counties still cry foul over a widening gap between the theory of local governance and the reality of services on the ground.

Corruption cases, bloated county wage bills, stalled projects, and delayed disbursement of allocations have been cited as reasons why certain counties are still lagging. Deep in the villages, the government's presence is not felt as the citizenry struggles to access basic services. Critical services like healthcare stalled. To help voice the concerns, the Eastern Africa Collaboration on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (EACOR) stepped up.

Under the directorship of Mrs Bether Kokach, the organisation speaks for the people, clearly spelling out the ignored articles of the Constitution on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR).



EACOR director Mrs Bether Kokach during past workshop training// Photo: Courtesy

EACOR, registered in Kenya as a human rights organisation, was founded on the belief that rights cannot be enjoyed when they exist only in ink.

“We saw that everyone was celebrating the Bill of Rights,” she says, “but almost nobody was talking about Chapter Four: the economic, social and cultural rights. Water, health, and education. The right people wake up and use every single day.”

Where others focused on service delivery, EACOR’s attention was drawn to the often-overlooked power held by citizens.

Turning Rights into Tools

EACOR’s approach is anchored in one radical shift, reframing ESCR not as charity but as constitutional entitlements. This shift has made citizens see governance not as an act of benevolence from leaders, but as an obligation owed to them.

To make this shift real, EACOR runs a flagship programme funded by Bread for the World, a German development agency. The programme is designed to cultivate active citizenship by equipping ordinary people with practical knowledge on how public finance works, how county budgets are made, and how to demand accountability.

“We get funds from Bread for the World in Germany for our project. For this project, the main objective and goal is to empower citizens to be able to demand these rights from the duty bearers,” said Kokach.

She outlines that community empowerment begins with training Agents of Change, volunteers drawn from local villages who are taught public finance, the Constitution, social accountability tools, and advocacy skills.

“They return home not with handouts, but with confidence and information. And when they speak, their neighbours listen,” she affirms.

Ms Pheny Akinyi, EACOR’s Programs Officer, recalls the hurdles they have experienced in the line of duty.

“When we started implementing this particular project, there was a lot of misunderstanding between us and some county government officials,” said Akinyi, who narrates how ward administrators got alarmed when a large number of residents began turning up for public participation meetings without being mobilised or offered sitting allowances.

“When hundreds of people show up for public participation without the usual invitation or promise of sitting allowance, ward administrators panicked. Some accused us of inciting people.” Pheny states humorously.

But as officials interacted more with EACOR and saw its methods, resistance softened. Conversations replaced confrontations, growing trust, and communities realised their voices had weight.

According to EACOR’s field agent Timothy Ochieng, based in Migori, the trained residents began participating in forums where budgets and development plans were discussed, and their input started shaping outcomes.

“We trained community members to ensure that projects were chosen based on community priorities, not political expediency,” Ochieng revealed.



Nyambona community members meeting with EACOR's team and the nyambona water project. Photo: Courtesy

Even though the fruits of civic education are evident within the communities, old habits persist. Some community members still expect and demand financial support from NGOs. Benedict Ogutu, a field agent in Homabay, explains how the organisation overcame such challenges.

“From the onset, we envisaged this. And in our community outreaches, we clarified, and we made the community understand that this project is meant for them, to empower them to address various challenges they are facing, particularly in our focus areas,” said Ogutu.

It is a message that has shaped the community to prioritize empowerment over charity as a lasting solution to existing problems.

EACOR’s biggest victories are not loud; they are evident in places where neglected projects suddenly come back to life.

An example is a borehole, drilled in 2019 by the county government of Migori. For six years, it posed a health hazard as stagnant water was a source of disease to the community. After EACOR’s intervention, community leaders confronted the issue with clarity.



Stalled borehole was drilled in Alara dago central sakwa Ward, by the county government of Migori. Photo: EACOR

“We were told to follow the right channels. That is why we went to our ward administrator to seek clarification about our stalled project,” says Mr Harrison Ouma, the Nyambona community water project chairperson.

According to Ouma, the knowledge of their rights prompted their action. The borehole has since been constructed.

In central Sakwa Ward, Migori County, pupils and villagers covered long distances to access water since the borehole project at

the school stalled. With EACOR’s guidance, the community demanded to see the County Integrated Development Plan.

“We decided to contact the ward administration to tell us if the project had an allocation,” says Mr Samwel Agwena, the project's chairperson. Budget documents revealed funds had been planned, putting the project’s completion back on track.

“What the EACOR team has done here is much better,” notes Mr Jared Osuri, the Head of Alara Dago Comprehensive School. “Without them, we could not realise that we are missing something here in this community.”

In Homabay County, residents of Kojwach ward celebrated the completion of their maternity block, which had stalled. EACOR awakened the residents to push for the clearance of the contractor’s outstanding debts, which facilitated the project completion.

“I took the initiative to call our MCA,” says Mr Isaac Onyango, the facility chairperson. We are happy that mothers now deliver safely, he added.

Across Migori and Homabay, public participation has brought forth results. Citizens question authorities and track projects independently. On WhatsApp groups and social media platforms, discourse on regional development has been a priority.



Mr Henry Oteino, the Ward Administrator of Kanyikela in Homa Bay// Photo: Courtesy

According to Mr Henry Oteino, Ward Administrator of Kanyikela, “Kanyikela people are now very sharp. If something is not done according to the Bill of Quantities, it is on my neck. That is exactly what devolution was supposed to look like.”

Henry’s counterpart, James Nyandika of Kojwach Ward, acknowledges the shift, noting that sensitisation has increased uptake of both county and national programmes.

EACOR also works with local and national civil society groups to amplify citizen concerns. Their social audits and community trainings have formed part of the policy debates. Caleb Wanga of Usalama Reforms Forum notes that EACOR’s work has empowered local communities to question how public finances are utilized.

“Their work has greatly impacted policy formulation or policy review at the county level and also at the national level,” said Caleb.

To sustain accountability, EACOR ensures communities have the skills to conduct social audits, verifying how public resources are used and if services promised are delivered. A social audit is a community-driven process of evaluating how public resources are used and whether government projects and services meet the needs of the people. It promotes transparency, accountability, public trust and citizen participation in governance.

Zephania Change, the organisation’s head of Monitoring and Evaluation, explains that social audits require a level of knowledge to understand the processes.

“Conduction of a social audit is a challenge, especially when selecting the right candidates to train,” he says, “In terms of the people that we get, if you get somebody who has no solid background, no educational background, then it will also be a challenge for them to grasp and to engage the duty bearers,” added Zephania



Wodielo Community member, agents of change, ward administrator and EACOR staff visiting the Early years education Centre in homabay county. Photo: Courtesy

To overcome the challenge, community members work alongside qualified and experienced agents.

“We ensure that our recruits meet some level of education,” explained Change.

According to the director, through empowerment, training and building local networks of agents of change, EACOR is creating a lasting voice that will survive beyond the program’s timeline.

“These local champions, ordinary citizens, are the real face of EACOR. They will keep demanding better services, even without external funding or staff,” said Mrs Kokach.

MUKASA FOUNDATION: A Chalk of Hope for Uganda's Kasyamba Village

By Sefu Sabila, Kasyamba - Uganda



Staff members of the Mukasa Foundation running activities to eradicate illiteracy and poverty by through socio-economic empowerment. Photo: Mukasa Foundation.

For decades, education has been a privilege for the haves in Uganda. The have-nots have long been subjected to menial duties not limited to tending to the needs of the haves. Despite the unfavourable odds, Geoffrey Mukasa charted his path to attain education and is now a ray of hope in the village.

In 2019, Geoffrey established the Mukasa Foundation to address the challenges underprivileged children face in accessing education. Located in Kasyamba Village, Zirombe Council in Luwero District, North of Uganda, Mukasa Foundation has created a huge socioeconomic impact. Targeting early childhood education, the less fortunate families have begun to appreciate Geoffrey's impact.

“Mukasa Foundation was started because of the recurrent socio-economic challenges of the society. We needed a change to turn things around from the usual and break the cycle,” Geoffrey Mukasa told [the Africa Feature Network](#).

Education is viewed as an equalizer and a measure of success in many countries. However, in Uganda, many children struggle to access it despite its clear stipulation in Uganda's constitution. Article 30 guarantees all persons the right to education, with Article 34(2) further reinforcing the child's right to basic education. According to a report by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Uganda, the country still faces major challenges in providing quality and accessible

basic education to children and adolescents.

UNICEF notes that access remains inequitable: The secondary level enrolment of the richest 20% of the population (43.1 per cent) is five times that of the poorest 20% (8.2 per cent). In terms of geographical distribution, the highest Secondary Net Enrolment is seen in Kampala (52 per cent) and the lowest in Acholi (7 per cent).

To suppress illiteracy levels and bridge the educational gap in Kasyamba Village, the foundation has involved the community in education-oriented investment, with their focus being on nursery, lower school and upper school.

“The Foundation currently operates a Nursery section of

Baby, Middle and Top Class, a lower Primary of 1 to 3, and an upper Primary section of 4 and 5. On average, the number of pupils in the nursery section is 35 and 65 in the upper primary section,” said Kasyamba, who added that the school is composed of vulnerable children from economically challenged families of Kasyamba.

Beginning operations in the post-COVID-19 crisis, Mukasa Foundation has remained a trusted bridge of education to vulnerable families. He says letting the community own the project has kept the foundation alive for six years. Often in Africa, organizations own the projects with little inclusion of the community, hence the premature termination of operations. Mukasa says that before any activity is rolled out to the villagers, it is tested. The created trust has sustained the Foundation as actions are tailored to the needs of the community.

“The communities that we operate in own all the projects, and with this approach of letting the communities own the project, it makes every project sustainable and impactful. Our approach is both theoretical and practical; the beneficiaries are within the community where Mukasa Foundation is found.

Whatever approach we agree to roll out is tested and proven to be working or not, it is through practical implementation,” said Mukasa.



Ceo Mukasa Foundation and Ryan Okello of Ryan Okello in Kenya during an visit in Kasyamba for knowledge sharing. Photo: Mukasa Foundation.

With the community owning the project, Mukasa Foundation operations have been running smoothly, expanding its humanitarian aid beyond education and adult learning. In Kasyamba village, there is a community library with elementary, secondary, and vocational books on agriculture, offering lessons on modern agricultural practices, largely embraced by the community.



Geoffrey Mukasa and Ryan Okello during the Green Summit in Trans Nzoia Kitale Kenya in October 2025. Photo: Mukasa Foundation

“The library serves as a resource centre for local students, teachers and the general community of Kasyamba. The community will become well-informed because people have access to a wealth of information. Agriculture is the backbone of Uganda’s economy, especially in rural areas. Books on modern farming techniques and sustainable agriculture will be made available to the farmers. We are eradicating illiteracy in our community as knowledge is power,” clarified Mukasa.

Mukasa Foundation is contributing to Uganda’s efforts towards Vision 2030, ensuring Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Four: ensure that all youths and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.

Literacy and numeracy skills, that is, reading, writing and calculating, are vital skills for individuals to further their learning and to develop throughout their lives independently.

Mr Yasmin Ddumaba, a beneficiary of Mukasa Foundation adult learning program, now a successful fruit tree farmer, planted four fruit trees, two mango and two avocado trees. Ddumaba will start harvesting his fruits next year. Avocado farmers in Africa are currently enjoying the market overseas. Ddumaba will now join the list of exporters from Kenya, Ethiopia, Malawi and South Africa, exporting tons of farm produce for good returns.

“Life is getting better every day ever since I joined Mukasa Foundation. I can now read and write. With the skills I will be able to handle the sales that come from the fruits, take care of my family, invest and expand my production. I now understand what is required to ensure my trees mature from the books we access in the library,” said Ddumaba. Evidently, the benefits brought forth by Mukasa Foundation are felt beyond the classroom walls. The community has been empowered socially and economically, and the environment has been rehabilitated through tree planting. With the health benefits of fruits, fruit trees have also played a role in disease control.

“These fruits will be both commercial and domestic. This means that we have preserved the environment, provided health in the family and earned income, which is our goal as Mukasa Foundation,” stated Mukasa

Ddumaba's five children study at Mukasa Foundation. Some learners here are rescued from working as labourers in rich neighbourhoods.

The African continent is currently battling the adverse effects of climate change, experiencing extreme long dry seasons and destructive long rains. Deaths and property damage have resulted from such severe weather patterns. African nations have called on the public to plant trees. The climate change discourse has not left even the young generation behind.

As leaders champion inclusion in the climate space, climate financing and justice for the continent through the Conference of the Parties (COP) and other United Nations climate agencies, Mukasa Foundation has included climate action education in its program.

Complementing class narratives of climate change action, each pupil is given a tree to plant and nurture to maturity, which Mukasa says has been successful and is contributing towards an increase in Uganda's forest cover.

"The success of our tree program has attracted many people who have replicated our program back in their countries. Ryan Okello Foundation from Kenya, using the same model, invited us to speak about our tree program at their Green Summit in Kitale, Kenya," said Mukasa.

Ryan Okello Foundation is a youth-led Organisation that advances environmental sustainability, climate leadership, agricultural innovation and capacity-building for young changemakers on the continent. Creating awareness on climate among children, Mukasa Foundation also works with Ms Climate Change Awareness Central Uganda Maaria Maureen, the pioneer of biodegradable hair innovation as a sustainable substitute for plastic hair extensions.

The duo aims to empower communities with knowledge, practical skills, and sustainable solutions that contribute to long-term environmental protection.

"I participated in the restoration of the Lazarus Forest, encouraging community members to plant trees and understand their importance in restoring degraded landscapes and improving local ecosystems, and we have witnessed communities embrace this action, which they thought was too small," said Maureen.

Additionally, together, they have been training the community on the dangers of land degradation and deforestation. The duo has emphasised proper land use, better soil conservation approaches and proper waste disposal.

"We have guided communities on simple, practical steps they can take to protect the environment, reduce vulnerability, and build climate resilience," Maureen added.

While Mukasa Foundation contributes to socio-economic empowerment through tree planting for commercial purposes, quality education and climate action, like any Organisation, financial constraints have stalled expansion of its services.

Uganda's flagship project, the Parish Development Model (PDM), was launched in 2022 to eradicate poverty. Other policies, such as free universal education and government-sponsored sensitisation programs, can equally play an integral role in suppressing poverty. Geoffrey Mukasa believes collaborative efforts are key to achieving the goals of Vision 2030.

"We need partnerships and collaborations from well-established individuals and organizations that are operating in the same space, learning from each other and reviewing approaches. We need financial resources for financing different projects to achieve our vision," said Mukasa.

The Foundation has partnered with various organizations within and beyond Ugandan borders, including Makerere University, Roofing Group (Forever Forestry), Ryan Okello Foundation from Kenya, Uganda Institute of Information and Communication Technology (UICT), among others.

Geoffrey Mukasa believes change can be realised if one is fully committed to bringing their desired change by putting their theoretical ideas into practice, as outcomes will always be noticeable in day-to-day living. "Changing people's lives is very possible as long as you practically do what you intend to do theoretically. The results are clearly seen. People's lives keep changing every day, and you see it. The environment keeps changing every day, you see and observe it," Geoffrey Mukasa said.

SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD: From worn-out Car tyres to Authentic Traditional Akala Sandals

By Erick Oundah, Kisumu - Kenya

Burning of tyres has been linked to long-term respiratory illnesses, cancer-related risks and widespread contamination of the food chain and groundwater. Often, worn-out tyres are openly burnt, which pollutes the air and the ecosystem.

According to Statista, global car sales reached approximately 74.6 million in 2024, a 2.3% increase from 2023. With a market share of 23 million cars, or 31%, China led total sales, followed by Japan, South Korea, North America, and the European Union, respectively.

As 1st World economies produce and buy new cars, African countries have been the largest importers of used cars. According to Market Data Forecast, the affordability of dependable models with low mileage has made nations like Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania and Nigeria become importation centres.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) released a report stating that 80% of vehicles imported into Sub-Saharan Africa in 2022 were used units. Most of these units are imported with worn-out spare parts, which are carelessly disposed of after a short use. To fight environmental pollution tied to imported used vehicles, Kenya introduced a bill where vehicles more than 8 years from the year of first registration cannot be legally cleared at the port.

Despite the stringent policies enforced to curb environmental pollution, contributed by the motor vehicle industry, unsustainable and hazardous methods are still being used to dispose of worn-out parts, particularly tyres.

Globally, approximately 1.5 billion waste tyres are generated annually. A bigger percentage of these tyres are burnt. The combustion process releases hazardous gases such as Sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide and volatile organic compounds, which affect the air quality.

In Polyview estate, Kisumu County, Kenya, we meet Zack Owiso, a local who has mastered the art of sustainably crafting designer sandals, popularly known in the region as “Akala shoes”, from used tyres. Under his brand name, the village creative, Zack is on a journey to make a societal impact.

“We do a lot of crafts here, from drawing to carvings, modelling and so on”, says the jubilant Zack, who passionately explains how greatly the surroundings have been impacted since his business began.

As 2025 marks Zack’s tenth year of turning waste into wealth, he reminisces about how his idea was born in the village, hence the brand name “Village Sandal”. Having never received any specialized training on shoemaking, Zack’s inherent artistry propelled him to greater heights of creativity.

“When I got into this business, I often made oversized sandals which were very uncomfortable. But over time, I have advanced to making fitting sizes which look neat and attractive”, says Zack.

At his small workshop in Ahero Junction, Zack designs a variety of sandals tailored to the intended work environment. As some footwears are beautified with beads of colours representing national flags, others are ruggedly built, extra-thick to withstand harsh terrains and unofficial work environments.

“These thick and strong sandals target those who do menial jobs, while these thin and beautifully designed ones are meant for special events and everyday wear because they are light”, says Zack

Nonetheless, amidst the assorted footwear that Zack makes, his most conspicuous product is the traditional Akala shoe, whose raw materials are exclusively acquired from used tyres, if not for the beads that are sometimes used for aesthetics. The Akala sandals are affordable due to the readily available raw materials.

“

The good thing with this Akala sandal is that from the same tyre we extract the sole, strap, and we only buy the small nails, which do not cost much”

says Zack, who contrasts that the modernized sandals are expensive and delicate as one has to buy leather, glue and part with a tailoring fee for joining the different parts of the shoes together.

It is an exercise which begins with the collection of used tyres. Every day, Zack visits “Jua kali” areas such as garages. It is from such places that he gets raw materials, the used tyres, at a subsidized cost.

“A worn-out tyre cannot be reused in a car. So, it will likely be burnt as waste which pollutes the environment, and that is basically what we are trying to avoid”, says Zack.

Amidst championing for a safe space for the living organisms, Zack’s skill has earned him a decent life. From this Akala shoemaking art, Zack has raised school fees for his two children, whom he says have never been sent out of school for fee-related reasons. Additionally, from his pocket, Zack comfortably affords for his parents, who live in the upcountry. Regrettably, with opportunities come challenges. Zack’s creativity has been met with an enormous setback, which he fears could cripple his venture in the near future.

“Some people come to my workplace to copy my designs, which they take to other places where they are made in bulk and sold at lower prices”, says Zack, who reiterates that such unfair business practices adversely impact startups.

It is an industry that requires innovation. From creative paintings to Rastafarian beads and stylish straps, Zack’s Akala Sandal designs have gone through cycles of creativity. On special occasions such

as the Reggae music extravaganza, fanatics throng his workshop to buy sandals designed with Rastafarian or Jamaican flag beads.

“There is also a Kenyan musician named Coster Ojwang, whose music touches on Luo traditions and cultural practices. At his concerts, fans wear these Akala shoes a lot”, says Zack

Akala sandal, the footwear design which can be traced back to the olden days, is slowly being reintroduced into the market, and the reception is promising.

“It makes me feel good when people are receptive to the olden wears because we can make them locally”, says Zack, who urges that there is no need for Kenyans to import products from China while the same can be locally made.

With its unrivalled durability and cheap maintenance cost, Zack has urged the populace to embrace Akala shoes not only to promote his business but to take part in the sustainability campaign.

“Akala shoes do not wear out; the same shoes can be worn by generations. There is no special approach to its maintenance; you simply wash and air it in the sunlight,” says Zack

With prices ranging from Kshs 400/=, both genders have embraced the village sandals. The prices are determined by the tedious process of cutting the used tyres to create a finished product, and the amount of time spent in fashioning a pair. With the aid of tools such as a chisel, scissors and a sharp knife, soles and straps are cut from a used tyre.

A worn-out tyre is cut and stretched on a flat table surface. Using a sole-shaped template, a drawing is made on the stretched tyre. Thereafter, a chisel or a scissor is used to cut the drawing mark that comes in the shape of a shoe sole. Afterwards, straps are cut from a thin-layered tyre. With the aid of a chisel, cuts are strategically made around the sole where straps are inserted before being hammered with tiny nails.



“A big-sized lorry tyre produces 12 Akala sandals, and if you multiply that by Kshs 400/=, that is the profit that you will get”, says Zack.

To make real his vision of zero tolerance to environmental pollution, Zack has a running training programme where his trainees are equipped with skills of recycling worn-out tyres into other useful items. Zack does this to empower youths and to dissuade them from environmentally unhygienic practices.

“I have trained so many youths who have become independent economically, and my only advice to youths is that skills will take you places. Don’t wait too long for white colour jobs”, says Zack

As the economy becomes unbearable to the masses and the job market shrinks, Zack has urged the youth that the future is in creating job opportunities, which is entirely dependent on inherent skills. Still, Zack has encouraged youths on startups that prioritize sustainability goals just like his Akala sandal idea.

“As youths, let us not overburden our parents. If you are over 18 years of age, find something to sustain you and your parent”, says Zack, who reiterates that Akala shoes, apart from saving the environment, reclaims the forgotten culture and impacts individuals economically.

With the wear and tear of car tyres happening every single day, there is a dire need for the populace to inculcate a sense of responsibility through safe disposal practices. Efforts such as Zack’s should be replicated to save the ecosystem from potential harms that come with burnt tyres.



HOW A NAIROBI COUPLE IS TURNING WASTE INTO INCOME, CONSERVATION IMPACT

BY PETER AOWA, NAIROBI - KENYA



A dumping site in Njiru, Nairobi // Photo: Teddy Baingoni

The World Bank reports that approximately 2.01 billion tonnes of Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) are annually generated globally, with projections indicating an increase to 3.4 billion tonnes by 2050. In Africa, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), working together with the Waste and Circular Economy Africa Program, estimates that the continent produced around 125 million tonnes of MSW in 2012, with projections of 244 million tonnes by 2025. Sub-Saharan Africa alone accounted for 174 million tonnes in 2016.

Major urban centres, including Lagos, Johannesburg and Nairobi, bear the greatest burden of this escalating waste crisis. In Njiru, a residential estate in Nairobi, Jacktech System Communication, a company run by Eunice Kapere and Jacob Ondere, is tackling the challenge. The company transforms waste into crushed materials, which are later sold to firms that pellet them before moulding them into usable end products. Jacktech System Communication also conducts community awareness programmes to promote environmental sustainability across Nairobi.

When Eunice started the business, it grew out of conviction and a deep desire to champion environmental conservation. She had previously worked as a sorting staff member in a company that transformed waste into reusable products, an experience that shaped her environmental commitment.

This is something that I have cherished for quite a long time, and my greatest motivation is to see a clean and safe environment,” Eunice said during an interview with Luminate Africa Journal.

“The environmental entrepreneur said that because it is impossible to eliminate waste, the priority should be to invent ways to manage it responsibly while creating economic opportunities. She emphasized that the waste sector can become a multi-million-dollar industry if well-structured and supported.



Jacob Ondere of Jacktech System Communication and Peter Aowa of AFN during the interview // Photo: Teddy Baingoni

“We just went through the World Bank data and that of UNEP, and you can tell for sure that this industry can generate millions of dollars if we are intentional. Solving the waste crisis while at the same time creating jobs for many,” Eunice noted.

As a visionary conservation champion, Eunice says that surviving in the industry requires sheer determination and discipline, especially for women, because the sector remains male-dominated.

Jacob Ondere, Eunice’s husband, was initially cautious about quitting his formal employment to join the business. Eunice, however, had already made up her mind to move the idea forward out of personal conviction.

“Initially,” Jacob says, “I thought it was a dirty job and I could not venture into it. In fact, I tried to discourage her, but being a woman of substance, she insisted that this is what she had made up her mind to do.”

As time passed, Ondere would balance his job with supporting Eunice at the site. When he finally became convinced that the business had strong social and economic potential, he resigned to join the company fully, taking up the role of Executive Director in charge of operations.

“I later learnt that she was not doing it professionally, then I decided to give her support. From there, I registered the company and started working formally,” said Ondere.

Jacob notes that while the company has made notable progress in production, major financial gaps continue to slow down its growth. With proper funding, the company plans to invest in value addition, which involves transforming waste into final products that generate higher returns than crushed material.

At Jacktech System Communication, the waste processing cycle begins with sourcing materials from different dumpsites in Nairobi, transporting them to the facility, sorting them, crushing them and packaging them for sale. The companies that buy the crushed materials pelletize them through an extrusion machine before moulding them into end products. The company has employed 17 workers directly and about 30 indirectly, with most of them women. Jacob says the women-to-men ratio aligns with international approaches aimed at empowering women who are often marginalized in economic spaces.

“The aim is to empower more women. Apart from being marginalized, they are more dedicated to work compared to men. But we also balance because we have men, mostly youths, who are also doing great jobs here,” Jacob noted.

Felix Otieno, a youthful driver at the company, has spent the past year waking up before dawn to be on the road by 4 AM to source waste from dumpsites. He aspires to run his own environmental conservation company one day. Felix attributes his strong work ethic to Eunice, who he says rose from a humble background to become an inspiring advocate for environmental protection.

“The greatest lesson I have learnt from working with this company is the power of consistency and hard work. I thank God for the opportunity to be part of this noble initiative. While I earn from my work, my motivation comes from the solutions we are offering to address the environmental crisis, which is now a global issue,” said Felix.

As the firstborn in his family, Felix says his family relies on him, a responsibility that pushes him to give his best at work, knowing that his effort helps keep his household going. As he often says, “We left home to change home.” He is now focusing his ambitions on Kisumu and remote parts of Nyanza in Western Kenya, where he believes many people have not fully embraced waste management opportunities.

Rose Atieno, who has worked at the company for six months, says it has provided her with a steady income to fund her children’s education and meet the demanding costs of urban life. She hopes to continue contributing to environmental conservation.

Alongside its recycling operations, Jacktech System Communication, founded in 2013 and headquartered in Nairobi, is a dedicated company providing sustainable solutions to climate-related challenges. As an environmental ambassador, the company leads programmes that promote ecological conservation, climate resilience and community empowerment.

The organization runs awareness, advocacy and training initiatives that educate communities on climate sustainability and responsible environmental practices. Jacktech System focuses on conserving natural resources and promoting environmental responsibility through paper recycling, clothing and plastics. It also conducts extensive tree-planting activities to reduce the impacts of extreme weather cases, including droughts, floods and storms.

In addition, the company supports community well-being by removing pollutants from rivers and other water sources to ensure access to clean and safe drinking water. Its efforts aim to enhance environmental resilience and improve the overall quality of life in the communities it serves.

Jacktech System Communication’s achievements have been made possible through strong partnerships with the national government, NCBA Bank Kenya PLC, the Kenya Climate Innovation Centre, the Knowledge and Innovation Community, Equity Bank Kenya and Shining Hope for Communities. The organization says its focus with its partners is to build a healthy nation rooted in mutual respect, open communication, trust and shared growth.

Through Jacktech System Communication, Eunice, Jacob and their team are showing that environmental conservation is not only an urgent necessity but also an economic opportunity. Their work reflects a growing movement across Africa, where communities and innovators are redefining how the continent responds to climate change and waste management.



Eunice Kapere and Jacob Ondere during the interview with AFNI Photo- [Teddy Baing'oni](#)

David Sebit:

South Sudanese Championing Consumption of Organic Food in Kenya

By Daniel Odhiambo, Nairobi - Kenya

David Ezekia Sebit's childhood was defined by constant survival through conflicts. Born in Yambio, South Sudan, in the early 1990s, he grew up during the Second Sudanese Civil War era. Villages were destroyed, families displaced, and schools destroyed. Children often wrote letters and numbers in the dirt because books and desks were scarce. Despite these hardships, David understood early that education could open a path beyond the instability that surrounded him.

In the early 2000s, his family sent him to Uganda for safety. Life there, as David describes during an exclusive interview with Africa Luminate Journal, demanded resilience. He survived on raw mangoes, walked long distances to school and worked on construction sites to pay tuition. For years, he lost contact with his family, uncertain if they were alive. Yet he persisted, driven by the belief that knowledge could shape a future beyond conflict and poverty.



Dagric products by Dagric limited// Photo: Courtesy

When David moved to Nairobi, Kenya, he found stability through mentors like Bishop Timothy Okelo of Chrisco Donholm Fellowship and lawyer Sospeter Opondo Aming'a. Their guidance helped him channel his experiences into entrepreneurship.

Drawing on his background in rural agriculture, he founded Dagric Limited, an organic agricultural company focused on sourcing products from smallholder farmers in Kenya and South Sudan while promoting health, nutrition and sustainable livelihoods.

Dagric Limited supplies dried hibiscus, organic honey, ginger, poultry and other natural products to urban markets. According to the Kenya Organic Agriculture Network, demand for organic foods in Kenya has grown by 35% over the past five years, driven by rising health awareness. Dagric bridges the gap by providing a reliable market for small-scale farmers.

One of the farmers supplying honey from South Sudan, Musa Malual, shared his experience working with Dagric. Malual says that Dagric has enabled him to scale up his production from subsistence to commercial.

"Before Dagric, my farm produced just enough for my family. Now I supply honey and ginger to Dagric every month. I can pay school fees for my children and even expand the farm," noted Musa, adding that he never imagined farming could give him this stability.



David Sebit, founder, Dagric limited// Photo: Courtesy

Musa's story is mirrored by dozens of other farmers who have transitioned from subsistence to commercial farming, benefiting from training on chemical-free practices that protect soil health and biodiversity.

David Sebit explains the company's mission. He says this motivation to launch Dagric came from a deep desire to support smallholder farmers in Africa and to address the ever-increasing health risks occasioned by processed foods. "I started Dagric because I wanted to show that African farmers can thrive if they have the right support. Our goal is to produce food that is healthy for families and profitable for farmers. This is how we change Africa—by empowering the people who grow our food and ensuring consumers get products they can trust." Said Sebit

Jane Mwangi, a resident of Nairobi who is a frequent customer of Dagric Limited, says she started buying Dagric honey and dried hibiscus because she wanted to avoid chemicals in her family's food. Knowing these products come from small farmers and are organic, Jane says, gives her confidence and peace of mind.

The company's work goes beyond nutrition. Through promoting organic farming, Dagric supports environmental sustainability. Bee farming initiatives enhance pollination, improving overall farm productivity, while chemical-free practices reduce soil degradation.

In 2024, Dagric worked with over 50 smallholder farmers, many of whom had never previously participated in export-oriented agriculture. The model has proven that business growth can coexist with ecological preservation.

The company also emphasizes youth and women empowerment. Women participate in preparing and packaging honey, ginger and hibiscus, gaining income and financial independence. Youth are trained in logistics, marketing, and business management, equipping them with skills to thrive in the agricultural value chain. This holistic approach ensures that entrepreneurship lifts entire communities rather than just individuals.

The regional health statistics have improved courtesy of Dagric Limited. Organic produce businesses are increasingly emerging to meet the rising demand, as many have begun to appreciate their tried-and-proven values. According to Kenya's Ministry of Health report of 2023, diet-related illnesses like diabetes and hypertension affect over 20% of adults in urban areas, largely due to processed and chemical-laden foods. By providing

chemical-free products, Dagric helps mitigate these risks. Today, nutritious alternatives are not only limited to the rural population but also accessible to urban households.

David's commitment extends to scaling his impact across East Africa. He plans to expand Dagric's network of farmers in South Sudan, Uganda, and Kenya while increasing product availability in regional markets. The company's vision includes training more farmers on organic practices, improving supply chains, and advocating for healthier diets across the continent.

Akol Deng, a farmer of South Sudanese origin, supplying ginger to Dagric Limited, applauded Sebit's venture as a game changer in East Africa.

"I never thought my small farm could reach Nairobi and other parts of Kenya. Dagric trained me, bought my ginger, and now my family's life is different. My children can attend school, and I feel proud that our farm contributes to people's health." Said Deng.



David Sebit during his interview with AFN at Dagric limited// Photo: AFN

Dagric Limited's story is not only about business success but also about community resilience and healthier lifestyles. Amidst the unhealthy living conditions in urban areas, Dagric Limited is on a mission to champion a healthy lifestyle through natural food while creating an economic impact.

The youthful agripreneur continues to inspire the communities he works with. By combining his personal experience with strategic vision, Sebit has created a company that empowers farmers, promotes organic consumption, and strengthens local economies.

KENYA: OVERLOOKED CREATIVE ECONOMY (ART) TACKLING UNEMPLOYMENT AMONG YOUTHS AND WOMEN IN TURKANA

By Sefu Sabila, Turkana - Kenya

In Kenya, the creative sector contributes 5.6% to the National Gross Domestic Product (GDP), according to the Kenya Bureau of Statistics' (KNBS) 2024 report. A report by Kenya National Commission for UNESCO (KNATCOM) stated that Kenya's creative economy is not only a source of jobs but a beacon of innovation and unity.

In 2023, the Ministry of Youth Affairs, Creative Economy and Sports, led the development of a draft for Kenya's Creative Economy policy, whose goal is to foster sustainable economic growth, innovation and cultural enrichment by leveraging the creative industries. The policy, once finalized and implemented, will support the sector to optimize its capacity and contribute to both social and economic benefits.

According to the United Nations Trade and Development department, the creative economy refers to creating, producing, and distributing goods and services that use creativity and intellectual capital as primary inputs.

In a recent survey in Sub-Saharan Africa, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) noted that the creative industry is a critical area for governments to invest in, as it is filled with culture, with young people incorporating technology, making the industry lucrative, and largely solving the unemployment crisis in the region.

Creative industry, including sectors like arts,

entertainment, media, design, and technology are major source of revenue generation and job creation for many African countries. This showed success in Nigeria, where the sector contributed \$1.4 billion to the GDP in 2023.



According to the National Bureau of Statistics, film production and music accounted for about 82% of the revenue from the creative industries sector.

In the Semi-Arid County of Turkana in Kenya, residents have tapped into the sector, with limited experience, depending on transferred knowledge of bead and basket weaving from generations, seasonal market access, limited government support and technology. Their art has since become their source of income. Making the most out of it, women and youths have infused culture and modernism to make their art timely, without fully eroding their culture.

While many took basket weaving and beading as a passive form of leisure, women and many youths have formed groups, bringing creatives from different sectors, who are reaping huge profits from their art.



The beads, baskets and traditional chairs (Ekitolong) are no longer meant for keeping the culture from generation to generation, but exported to foreign countries, with European countries forming their main market.

Turkana are known for their beautiful culture and women gracefully putting on their colourful beads, and carrying their traditional baskets made from Mkoma Tree (Doom Palm). The art has become economical.

Conceptor Kagene chairlady Mrukano Women group in Eliye Turkana Central, majoring in basket making from Doom Palm found at the shores of Lake Turkana, are currently living a better life following the sales, no longer waiting for donations from the government during extreme droughts, as they can buy food.

“Our lives have changed. We are no longer making these pieces for culture but for markets. In our community, everyone is talented, either in making our traditional neckpieces, bracelets or baskets like us. But we decided to make it different, not for culture,” Kagene explained.

Kilometres away in Turkana West, Kalobeyei Women Handicraft Cooperative, a women-led Community Based Organisation (CBO), majoring in beading, basketry and tailoring, has employed not only residents but also refugees.

Sarah Sikatenda, a Congolese national elected by both locals and refugees, is the current chairperson of the cooperation. In an interview with Africa Feature Network, Sikatenda said the initiative has been life-changing both socially, emotionally and economically, in terms of the situation of both communities.

United by unprecedented situations back in their home countries, the workshop acts as a social joint for more than 300 women. Sikatenda says the conversations ease the pain for many who were abused during the conflict in their countries; it is a distraction from home issues and a source of income for many women around.

“This is not only economically based; it is like a therapy session for many of us. We are all healing from wounds we cannot tell. Some have been abused, battling domestic violence; coming here and being engaged is not in vain. We have seen results; mothers can feed their families,” she said.

Echoing the sentiments of Kagene and Sikatenda, Tabitha Wanjiru, treasurer of Kalobeyei Women Handicraft Cooperative said that the venture has been successful and improved the living conditions of many families within, despite the saturation of bead makers around. According to Wanjiru, what is setting them apart is learning the new trends in the market space and



Seated, Sarah Sikatenda, chairperson of Kalobeyei Women Handicraft Cooperative in Kakuma, during a meeting with members. The Cooperative has employed over 300 Women from Kakuma Refugee Camp and Turkana residents. Photo: Sefu Sabila.

beauty industry, which makes their products outstanding and marketable.

Early this year, they received a tender for making 24,000 pieces of beads to be exported to Japan, and another tender from England.

“Everyone around can make beads, making it a challenge to sell them. For your art to be picked, it must bring out what your intent is, the true culture of the Turkana people, or the South Sudanese people in their bead. For even more sales, we have learnt a little modern art and blended with different cultures so as not to lose our identity, but acquiring those shapes is very expensive. People from outside love this, for that we received a huge order from Japan and England this year, which is a key milestone for us,” Sikatenda proudly said.

Kagene says their biggest client are tourists who come to the Eliye Springs, commonly referred to as the ‘White Sands of Egypt’ for holidays, who purchase their baskets in large quantities.

“We do not have a specific market; we often receive high sales when people visit Eliye Springs during holidays, very few orders come from within, but the sales made from the visitors are worth every effort of our 15 members. Our local people often reject our prices; very few often buy our baskets because they believe they can weave,” she said.

Speaking during the handing over of registration certificates to several groups, James Akorot, a senior cooperatives officer in Turkana County Government, lauded the groups for organizing themselves into a legal entity.

“This registration empowers cooperatives to operate within the law, access funding opportunities, and build meaningful partnerships that will uplift local livelihoods. We encourage members to remain united, focused, and accountable,” Akorot said.

With the market a key challenge for many groups, and frustrations during the registration process, Sikatenda said in their small capacity, while waiting to tackle the issues, they have changed lives, created employment opportunities, and trained others who have moved with the skills back to their countries.



Following their order, they opened a small loan scheme to members with a repayment of 10% interest, accommodating the situation of members. According to Sikatenda, the new aid scheme categorization by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has cushioned many members locked out of donations in categories three and four.

“After categorization, a majority of us could not receive aid; other women even left for their countries. Kalobeyi Women Handicraft Cooperation has been able to help many of us. We can pay bills and look after our families and employ many women; all we need is support and market, be it local or international,” she said.

The Refugee Department Services (RAS), commenting on the power of the unexplored sector in the region, said that crime rates have reduced as youths are engaging in creating cultural pieces and receiving small orders, motivating them to produce and market their products.

“Cases of violence and insecurity have reduced within the camp; youths are using their culture to make money. Recently, a group called Amat Arts received an order of \$1000 of their drawing pieces. It is paying, all they need is support from the government and also well-wishers to market their arts,” said an officer from RAS.

Kagene believes that their venture, if supported, can improve livelihoods within, as families will be able to buy food from basket sales when they acquire a consistent market. In the current environment, offering others opportunities is halted by payment issues due to a lack of markets.

The two creatives have created opportunities for youths and women in the region, calling for training, knowledge exchange programs, and donation of modern machines to keep up with new trends in the market.

“Young people are taking up these skills to another level, incorporating technology, but our region lacks access to new technological designs for us in beading. We rely on supplies from Nairobi, which is quite expensive. Again, taking up a team for training and exhibitions is beyond our means,” Sikatenda told Africa Feature Network.

Sikatenda further said that due to the inconsistency of the market, most of their products end up losing quality due to exposure to the sun and dust that rusts off the beads and baskets. Lacking a permanent structure, Kagene and her colleagues display their baskets outside their homes and beside the road for the lucky buyers. The frequent shifting can cause some to break and lose shape due to constant movement.

Kenya hosts different creative exhibitions, the two dream is to be incorporated into the Kenya National Chambers of Commerce and Industry (KNCCI), for bigger trade and exhibitions.

“The fee to join KNCCI is our one-year sales. But if we can get support to join and be members, we will have local customers becoming aware of our products and ordering instead of them wearing off from dust and sun for long stays. Our dream is to be able to join KNCCI,” Sikatenda said.

With the creative economy proving to be a key employment opportunity in the area, the Creative Economy Bill 2024, currently before the Senate, seeks to leverage challenges incurred, including creating an enabling environment through direct and indirect support for creative artists and organisations.

Additionally, the Bill seeks to formulate policies for industry development; promotion of entrepreneurial skills, investment in infrastructure, review of trade policies, facilitation of access to funds, establishment of dialogue forums for growth strategies, and facilitation of market access.

International Labour Organization (ILO), aligning with Goal 8 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), focuses on fostering inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment, and decent work for all involved in the creative industry. ILO champions the need for stronger social dialogue, development-oriented policies that facilitate productive activities, create decent jobs, foster entrepreneurship, and stimulate creativity and innovation.

Kenya is implementing the Creative Bill 2024 and adopting the ILO policy on improving the creative sector. Conceptor Kagene and Kalobeyi Women Handicraft Cooperative and many others, creating opportunities with their art, can solve the unemployment crisis in Turkana.

Like film and music growing at a fast rate in the country, getting international recognitions and creating opportunities for many young Kenyans, traditional art, if fully supported like the Masaai culture that has received global recognition, is a tale women and youth in Turkana are eagerly waiting for, with the hope that the Senate will approve the Bill currently in their hands.

Inside KPF Vision to Scale Up Poultry Farming in Western Kenya

By Norman Nyandega, Kisumu - Kenya



"Kuku Mama" at work! Photo: Norman Nyandega

Africa faces a deep youth unemployment crisis. Despite a growing workforce, the number of available jobs remains limited. In 2023, the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated that roughly 62 million young people in sub-Saharan Africa were neither employed nor formally educated, nor in training. It is a whopping figure which translates to nearly a quarter of Africa's youth bulge.

In Kenya, unemployment poses a significant challenge, with nearly 75% of the population under 35 years old. As opposed to the olden days, when education was equated to socioeconomic success, a college diploma no longer guarantees a job. Formal employment remains elusive, leaving informal work or subsistence farming as the only fallback plan for many young people.

In the wake of the job crisis in Africa, the story of Kenya Poultry Farmers Limited (KPF) stands out as a pathway from struggle to enterprise. From a small backyard chicken business, the company has carved out a space and left a socioeconomic footprint. From creating employment opportunities to supporting smallholder farmers, poultry farming has become a viable livelihood for hundreds.

Hezron Oluoch is a sole proprietor whose idea of poultry farming was formalized in 2010 as a student preparing for the final exams. Resources were limited, but he was unbowed. Back at home, Hezron had to forgo further education to pave the way for his siblings. A short visit to his cousin in Western Kenya's Kisumu City changed his perspective. Hezron borrowed most of the poultry farming equipment from his cousin, a retired poultry farmer.

The modest earnings from his newly found venture enabled him to pursue a Diploma in Business Management at the Kenya Institute of Management while running the business. He later graduated with a Bachelor in Project Planning and Management from the University of Nairobi in 2015.

With the rising demand for poultry, Hezron formally registered the enterprise.

As a success story, KPF received a \$5,000 grant from the Tony Elumelu Foundation in 2016. This was a boost that catalysed the business expansion. Farm stock increased, eggs and chicks were added to the product line, and the business diversified into animal feeds.



KPF Founder and Director, Mr. Hezron Oluoch, during an interview with AFNII Photo: Norman Nyandega

Strategic partnerships with companies such as Ungha Feeds, Sigma Feeds, and Kenchic boosted the business. KPF's clientele grew beyond borders with organizations such as Silverlands Tanzania, Impex Watering Solutions, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and Hendrix Machinery formalizing business partnerships through purchases and support. Today, KPF owns Dala Feeds, a feed manufacturing plant, alongside its poultry business.

KPF has also transformed the socioeconomic status of farmers through its Inclusive Contract Farming (ICF) model.

"Many people hesitate to engage in large-scale farming for fear they may not get a ready market. But with a guaranteed market, they are willing to explore," said Hezron.

KPF provides poultry training and extension services, sells farm inputs at subsidized rates, and buys back mature chickens, ensuring farmers' efforts are never wasted. Over 1,000 smallholder farmers now benefit, including those managing as few as 50 chickens.

Angeline, a smallholder farmer, kick-started a poultry farming venture with 50 chickens. Within five years, she managed over 600 chickens



Products of Dala Feeds, by KPF Photo: KPF

and now owns two large chicken houses. Her living conditions have improved from a mud house to a permanent home, illustrating the transformative potential of farming.

KPF's activities have boosted the regional economy through employment for jobless youths. In 2015, the company had just one employee. Today, it employs 17 full-time staff. The organization emphasizes hands-on training and open opportunities for youth. Those without prior experience are not exempt. Fatuma Obuya, Operations Supervisor, says, "We do not have strict employment policies; anyone teachable can grow here. The skills gained are transferable and valuable." Employees also receive financial assistance to pursue further education.

KPF has pioneered "Kuku Mama" – or "Chicken Woman" – a women-led initiative that began in February 2025. Women operate the slaughterhouse, prepare chicken for sale, and earn an average of \$200 monthly. For many, this income has raised school fees and improved living standards.

Janet Atieno, a single mother, was introduced to Kuku Mama after leaving what she termed a troubled marriage. Today, her business thrives, her children attend school, and she enjoys good housing. Florence Anyango, chairperson of Kuku Mama, has seen her children advance academically, with her eldest now a teacher, another in university, and the youngest preparing for medical school. By the time this story was prepared, Kuku Mama had 23 members, with an expansion plan in the pipeline.

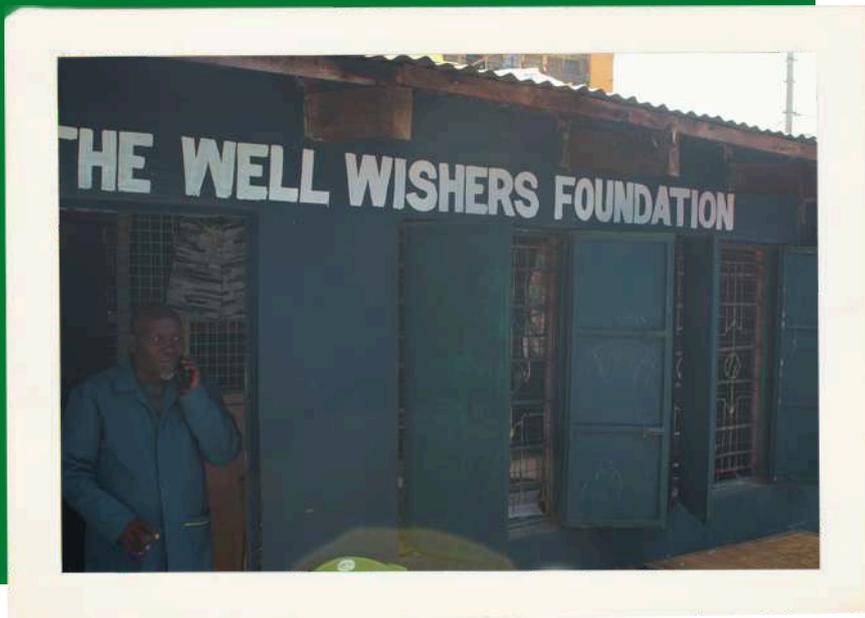
The impact extends beyond poultry. Maize farming has increased as KPF purchases maize for its feed mill, boosting the local economy. Chicken, once a luxury for the privileged, is now accessible to average households through Kuku Mama, offering affordable portions at around \$0.25. With greater access to protein and eggs, the initiative also contributes to improved food security and community health.

To tighten its agricultural grip and maximize returns, KPF plans to acquire a soya extruder machine to reduce feed costs by 60%, explore sustainable uses for chicken feathers, and create a centralized operation consolidating all activities under one roof.

WELL-WISHERS FOUNDATION

TRANSFORMING LIVES OF TEEN MOTHERS IN NAIROBI'S MATHARE SLUMS

By Peter Aowa, Nairobi - Kenya



“I am a product of Well-wishers.” These are the first words from Paul Andega, chairman of the Well-wishers Foundation, as we sit down for a candid talk in their office in Mathare.

Growing up in one of the largest informal settlements in Africa, Paul says that life was challenging. Hailing from a humble background, affording a meal could often be a struggle. Raising school fees was a problem.

It took the intervention of a well-wisher for Paul to go through his post-secondary education, and this redefined his understanding of what life was and how important it is to help those in need.

Years later, the number of teenage mothers increased. The World Health Organisation in 2024 reported that every year, an estimated 21 million girls aged 15 to 19 in developing nations become victims of teenage pregnancy, as approximately 12 million of them give birth.

In Kenya, informal settlements have recorded a high increase in the number of teenage pregnancies, with the United Nations Sexual and Reproductive Health Agency 2022 report estimating that 330,000 adolescent girls become pregnant each year, the majority of whom come from low-income settings.

With rising cases of teen pregnancies, drug abuse, and crime in Mathare, Paul felt a need to bridge this gap through a sustainable approach other than short-term solutions. After engaging a few like-minded friends, they founded the Well-wishers Foundation as a community outreach organisation in 2015.

In 2019, the organisation was registered as a Community-Based Organisation and intensified its approach to addressing key problems in Mathare. Their main priority was addressing the challenges faced by teen mothers. Over the years, the Foundation has partnered with several other organisations to strengthen its work.

HURUGLOBAL partnered with Well-wishers on a reproductive health system project where they distributed reusable sanitary pads to more than 300 teen girls. RHD Kenya partnered with the Foundation in capacity building on child protection and development through a youth job shadowing programme. SHOFCO, on the other hand, partnered with Well-Wishers Foundation on skill development among teen mothers and refugees through a project known as the Youth Voice project.

Silas Nyaoko Ongei, the organisation's secretary, says the decision to join Well-wishers was informed by his upbringing in Mathare and the desire to give back to the community.



A tailoring session by The Wellwishers Foundation!! Photo- Teddy Baing'oni



A pedicure demonstration session by The Wellwishers Foundation!! Photo- Teddy Baing'oni

“I have been born and bred in this area. Growing up, I faced a lot of challenges, and I relate to ghetto life. I remember at some point my mother, who took care of me and my other siblings, had to take me to the village to study due to financial struggles she faced as a single mother in the slum,” Ongei recalls.

Ongei says that crime claimed many lives, with his own friends and neighbours killed either by the mob or police officers after being caught in the crime. He believes that the Well-wishers Foundation will address the vice.

As of today, the organisation, Paul says, has transformed the lives of 30 teen mothers with employability skills in tailoring and beauty therapy. They are now in the third batch, with about 20 currently in class.

Cynthia Omondi, a mother of twin girls, is part of the last cohort that graduated in October 2025. Omondi shares her experience from being a teen mother to getting a second chance in life to make a difference.

Navigating the demanding responsibilities of motherhood and studies was not easy for Cynthia, but her determination outshone the harsh realities of life. All she wanted was to make a difference in life and be in a position where she could take care of her two daughters and look after her siblings.

Just like Cynthia, Mitchell Atieno has also redefined her purpose through Well-wishers. Atieno, who got pregnant at the age of 17 when she was about to transition to Form Four, says that life became unbearable.

“I got my son at the age of 17. I was about to go to Form Four when this happened, and truly, life was so harsh,” said Atieno. A staunch rugby player, she defied all odds and resumed her secondary studies. This she did vehemently, not unbowed by stigma and the harsh realities of life in Mathare.

While she, Atieno, admits she did not have difficulty staying in school since she was partly sponsored, thanks to her outstanding rugby skills, back home, life was unbearable. Atieno, who is part of the cohort that graduated, is back at Well-wishers to hone her skills in fashion design, this time majoring in different outfits. The Well-wisher Foundation has welcomed her.

Over and above that, while many male youths in the slums still struggle to embrace skills as part of sustainable solutions to joblessness, Gravince Otieno, a 19-year-old boy, sits among the teen mothers, paving his path to becoming a fashion designer. He says his passion for fashion and design keeps him focused.

Both my mother and father are fashion designers, and I have always loved to be a designer. I chose to be here not only to get skills but also to keep myself busy and avoid peer pressure. You know, it's the origin of crime and drug abuse here in the slums,” Gravince said.

Richard Elvis, a Bachelor of Arts in Hospitality and Hotel Management graduate from Mt. Kenya University, is the lead facilitator at Well-wishers Training Centre. Asked why he did not pursue his career in hospitality, Elvis says it was a decision shaped by his love for the arts and fashion design.

“I have always loved fashion, and it was evident from the onset that I would be a fashion designer. This is the path I'm pursuing. It's my purpose,” he says.

While he did not study fashion from the beginning, he intensified his pursuit while in his second year at Mt. Kenya University. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and schools got closed, Elvis used the time to get training from designers who believed in him. He tapped into the social media space and spent most of his time studying fashion on YouTube.

Away from fashion and design, we meet Immaculate Achieng, a facilitator at the training centre enclosed in a 12 by 14 cube partitioned into two rooms. She is the youngest of all present. The size of the room has not stopped her from training her students.

Like many of those she is training, Immaculate also got pregnant when she had just enrolled for her college studies and had to balance motherhood and caring for her grandmother, who she says played the role of a mother after her own mother passed away.

“I was not bold enough to go back to school after giving birth due to fear of stigmatization. I felt like I had failed my grandmother by not going back even after fees had been paid,” she says.



The Wellwishers foundation team poses for a photo with the AFN team! Photo- Teddy Baing'oni

She, however, charted a new path in beauty and has been training teen mothers at the facility in beauty therapy.

Lack of funding and support from development partners is one of the major challenges facing the Well-wishers Foundation. As we conclude our interviews, Paul makes a rallying call for support to help the organisation reach more youths and advance the advocacy even to male youths. “We are hoping to transform the lives of not less than 500 youths in Nairobi in the next 5 years, but our greatest challenge is finance. We have a plan to not only train them but also link them to the market,” Paul notes.

HOW COMMUNITY CLIMATE INITIATIVES ARE EMPOWERING GHANA'S YOUTH TO LEAD CHANGE

By [Joshua Narh](#), Accra - Ghana



Climate Sociologist's Climate education outreach for elementary school. Photo by: Joshua Narh

Across Ghana, the effects of climate change are evident in the farms, markets, and homes of ordinary people. Farmers struggle with unpredictable rain patterns that affect planting and crop yield, while fishermen witness declining fish stocks in the once-booming waters. Coastal communities in the Volta, Greater Accra, and Central regions are watching homes and livelihoods disappear as rising sea levels creep inland. Food prices remain unstable as a result, and health risks such as meningitis continue to increase in communities in the Northern and Ashanti regions.

Despite these realities, climate knowledge in many schools and communities remains scarce or purely theoretical, even though the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 13 calls for urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. Learners are often introduced to climate topics through classroom theory, yet few connect these lessons to their daily lives or the challenges facing their communities. Despite interventions by governments, private agencies, and civil society organisations, the gaps in understanding remain.

For Emmarny Leuzi, Founder of The Climate Sociologist, a community-oriented climate education organisation, this gap is more than an educational issue; it is a societal one. Drawing on her background in sociology, she observed that environmental interventions often fail because they

overlook the human experience. She believes that scientific reports and policies benefit no one when they do not resonate with the people most affected.

In her words, whatever policy or environmental decision is made, "it is made by humans for humans," and people embrace change only when it feels connected to their lived experience. To her, environmental issues are also social issues, and communities need to understand the world around them before they can protect it.

Leuzi expresses her conviction that the most urgent climate challenge facing Ghana and Africa is not infrastructure, money, or technology but education. Without climate literacy, communities cannot recognise problems, demand solutions, or safeguard their livelihoods. She warns that the absence of climate education limits the capacity to respond to rising conflicts over grasslands, declining food quality, dying animals and dispersal of families, adding that communities cannot demand what they do not understand.

Climate change touches every part of daily life in Ghana. Food scarcity drives prices up, livelihoods are disrupted, and communities face difficult choices. Even everyday tools, machines, and vehicles wear out faster due to higher temperatures and humidity.



Some competing schools displaying "Arts for Climate Advocacy" // Photo: Courtesy

To address these gaps, The Climate Sociologist has developed a multi-level education model targeting children, youths, students, and adults. The approach is practical, community-centred, and culturally relatable. Young children are introduced to climate concepts through playful, hands-on learning that explains ecosystems and sustainability in simple ways. Mid-level students engage in creative projects that link climate ideas to everyday experiences. Senior High School students participate in Green Tales, an inter-school competition that blends climate learning with Ghanaian culture through research, poetry, drama, art, and quizzes.



Intercultural project on Connecting Climate Action with Cultural Wisdom // Photo: Courtesy

For the youth and general public, the organisation uses socially engaging campaigns such as Ahaban, a mobile, music-driven activity that encourages the use of leaves instead of single-use plastics. Emmaryn and her team create an atmosphere filled with music, bicycles and approach street vendors to ask if they have leaves available. If not, they politely decline to buy. This creates a gentle but persuasive nudge that is both educational and entertaining. Rather than protests, the team relies on culture, energy, and positive peer influence to encourage behaviour change.

The results of these interventions, Leuzi says, have been visible. Vendors now offer leaves to customers, youth groups are designing creative packaging from local leaves, and students who previously saw climate change as an abstract topic are now asking about sustainability careers. Teachers are also adopting local examples to make lessons more relevant. Environmental institutions such as the Environmental Protection Authority and relevant ministries have opened their doors to youth-led input, while some companies are beginning to track carbon footprints and adopt environmentally responsible practices.

Schools that previously had to be visited are now contacting the organisation themselves, requesting climate sessions and partnerships. Still, challenges persist. Some institutions deny the reality of climate change, while others consider environmental issues secondary. Leuzi is convinced the biggest barrier is not financial but behavioural. She believes that attitude and sociological behaviour can drive change faster than money.

She argues that effective climate action requires merging scientific knowledge with social understanding and community behaviour. Climate science identifies the problems, sociology explains community responses, and behavioural insight ensures that change lasts. She observes that climate vulnerability is unequal and shaped by social structures, making interventions that are culturally aware essential for fairness. Communities adopt sustainable practices such as recycling or tree planting more willingly when they are embedded within shared norms rather than imposed from above.



Research on the impact of climate policy and donation exercise// Photo: Courtesy



Emmarn Leuzi, Founder- The Climate Sociologist// Photo: Courtesy

Looking ahead, Leuzi believes that the Climate Sociologist's model can be replicated across Africa if adapted to local cultures. She observes that strong collaborations between educational institutions, civil society groups, climate-focused organisations, financial institutions, and manufacturers can accelerate progress more effectively than international conferences alone. Partnerships can embed climate education in school curricula and inspire youth-led innovations that address local challenges.

Her motivation comes from watching young people step into climate roles, including those outside the sciences. She points to financial institutions seeking advice on reducing carbon footprints and manufacturers adjusting their systems as signs of progress. Recent global meetings, including the Brazil conference of parties, showed a visible shift with young Africans demanding climate justice for their countries.

Through education, engagement, and cultural connection, communities in Ghana are beginning to see climate challenges not as distant global issues but as realities that require their participation. Leuzi believes that meaningful change starts with understanding, involvement, and small daily actions that collectively shape a better future for all.

Junks to Jewels:

Repurposing Discarded Jerrycans while Strengthening Environmental Sustainability

By Erick Oundah, Migori - Siaya

Plastic waste has been a global crisis. Daily, Kenya's capital, Nairobi, generates an estimated 2400 tonnes of solid waste, with plastic accounting for 20%.

The World Bank Group postulates that of the total wastes generated, only 45% is recycled and reused in an economically and environmentally beneficial manner. Careless waste disposal is not just a practice in Nairobi; it is a trend in Kenya's major urban and rural setups. The impact of waste piles in urban areas is devastating.

As the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) races against time to meet the 80% target for total waste management, individuals who share NEMA's dream of a safe environment have not been left behind.

Nixon Ambiche, a changemaker hailing from Siaya County, has shifted residence to the Oruba Royal village, Migori County, where he is adding his little strides of environmental rehabilitation to the general national effort.

Pursuant to the provisions in the Constitution of Kenya, 2010, every person is entitled to a clean and healthy environment and has a duty to safeguard and enhance the environment. However, the generation of waste continues to confront man in his living environment. For instance, biodegradable materials and biomedical wastes are a menace in Migori County.

As a certified Pharmacist, Nixon redeems his leisure time in collecting used plastic jerrycans, which he uses to forge an assortment of items ranging from baskets to pen holders, tissue holders and many more. From wasted jerrycans, Ambiche crafts all kinds of useful items for homesteads. Nixon's craftsmanship can be traced back to 2022, when he lived in Meru town.

"I had a friend in Meru who used to do this work, and I got fascinated and requested him to train me. It was not easy. I made countless mistakes before I could get to this level", said Nixon.

Nixon recollects the losses he made at his early stages in the venture, as most of the raw materials which he bought with hard-earned cash were damaged through the crafting process.

"With the encouragement I received from my friend, I got better with time and reached a level where all my products were bought without second-guessing", said Nixon.

Nixon's ideas of designs are a result of his creativity, the internet and like-minded friends like Brian Olunga, who hails from Asembo. According to Nixon, forging a creative product from a 20-litre jerrycan takes between 60 – 70 minutes, while a small jerrycan takes a maximum of 46 minutes to turn into a usable household item.

"I can use this 10-litre jerrycan to craft item holders, such as utensil and cloth holders or even a lampshade. As for the 20-litre jerrycan, I can craft a basket with a beautiful lining inside", said Nixon.

“

The economy is not very favourable, and one can hardly survive on a regular income. Therefore, whatever amount I make from this side hustle supplements my needs. I am no longer a slave of loans



Using small drug tins, Nixon forges pen holders, uses 3-litre cooking oil jerrycans to make tissue holders and PVC pipes to fabricate lampshades. It is a process that creates anything in the form of a carrier that one can think of. From baskets with layers inside to plastic carrier bags, the products' durability is undeniable. With the aid of fashioned blades, Nixon cut out small pieces of jerrycans to draw patterns such as flowers, fish models, birds and so on. Most clients present designs of choice, which are drawn on jerrycans as per their desire. It is an art which Nixon undertakes freestyle without tracing or referring to any template, a practice which he attributes to his innate artistry since childhood.

The plastic parts that fall off in the course of the forging process are later collected and weighed before being sold to recycling companies to make other products. It is a process whose end goal is environmental conservation. No single plastic is combusted or unsustainably discarded.

"These small particles that appear useless I sell to recycling companies, and they use the same to make utensils, water tanks, pipes and many more, so there is nothing useless in this world", said Nixon.

"The economy is not very favourable, and one can hardly survive on a regular income. Therefore, whatever amount I make from this side hustle supplements my needs. I am no longer a slave of loans", reiterated Nixon.

His journey has, on multiple occasions, been met with hurdles, as most people do not appreciate creativity. It is a painstaking process where any error leads to jerrycan damage or bodily injury. A good number of surgical blades used in the incision process must be readied to limit disruptions in case of damage to a blade. To make the exercise less strenuous, hard jerrycans are first exposed to heat to reduce firmness before cutting.

"Sometimes potential clients get shocked when I tell them some of these products go for Kshs 750/=. In their mind, they are like; How can I buy a jerrycan at 750/=:, not knowing the work and time that has gone into it?" said Nixon.

Nevertheless, Nixon's products have attracted clients nationally. Most of his marketing happens on social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, Instagram and direct WhatsApp contact via the public business phone number. Some clients visit his workshop to purchase products as referrals. For his good work in waste management, Nixon has received gifts from multiple well-wishers.

"On many occasions, I have received calls from strangers who just reach out to appreciate me for the good work I am doing to our environment", said Nixon.

On his TikTok timeline, "Ultimateartsstore_migori", Nixon shares most of his finished products and the process of creating a variety of items. Here, he has built a huge community that resonates with his progressive creativity. In what is seen as a strategy of adding more hands to waste management, Nixon has kick-started a campaign to train youths in crafting and strategic waste management.

"This industry is fast coming up, and so many youths want to be trained; we have to do just that", said Nixon, who is making an impact in the community by training the neighbouring Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) learners from schools, not limited to Migori Primary.

He purchases used yellow jerrycans from cooking oil retailers where a 20-litre jerrycan ranges between Kshs 80 – 100. The white jerrycans are bought from health facilities.

"Some businesses and hospitals give me these jerrycans for free; others sell them. But all the same, when burnt, the environment is polluted. So, buying them is the best choice because I have a job with them", said Nixon.

"If termites keep on feasting on your cedar posts, plastic is the way to go. A mixture of ground plastic and sand can give you termite-resistant fencing poles for your compound", said Nixon, who emphasized the value present in recycling plastic wastes. The proprietor said that an individual is as poor as he handles waste.

As Kenya's creative space evolves, Nixon has urged youths to prioritize innovations that uphold sustainability goals. County governments and the National government have also been encouraged to identify and sustain youth-led ventures aimed at championing climate change.

"Parents should identify the potential of their children at a young age and motivate them to nurture it, and it will not only help them as individuals but will help the whole community. Let no parent belittle any gift, some can be good farmers, artists and so on", said Nixon.

Food Basket: Transforming farming in semi-arid Baringo

By Maureen Chesang, Baringo - Kenya

Baringo County in Kenya has long grappled with the devastating effects of climate change. Considered a semi-arid region, farmers must wrestle with tactical ways to adapt to harsh climatic conditions. In Kabimoi village, Eldama Ravine Sub-County, Bornes Korir, a farmer, has embraced organic agriculture to sustain his livelihood. The Hazola plant, conspicuous in his farms, is his solution to change. Predominantly aquatic, the Hazola plant is grown in fish ponds, where it navigates the challenges of water scarcity, soil degradation, and climate change.

In the fish ponds, the Hazola plant absorbs nutrients from the fish excretes. It then helps maintain clean, oxygenated water for the fish while the fish feed on the plant. The water body where the plant grows boasts rich nutrients and can be used to spray other crops for healthy germination.

“When harvested, the crop serves multiple purposes; it is used to feed poultry, rabbits, and even goats. It is a natural food that makes my chicken grow very healthy with a reasonable weight,” says Bornes as he inspects his farm. She added that initially, she could spend a lot of money buying animal feed, a trajectory that has changed with the emergence of the Hazola plant.

Hazola’s benefits are not limited only to the soil. Bornes has reduced the uptake of artificial vaccination on her poultry as the Hazola plant has been an effective disease repellent.

“In my farm, crops and animals depend on each other. It is a cycle of life where the pond feeds the crops; crops feed the animals, and animals feed back into the system,” she remarked with a smile.

Korir’s agroecology approach leaves nothing to waste. At the fish pond, poultry droppings speed up the plant growth, and when the water gets dirty, it is drained and collected. The collected fish pond water is used as a natural fertilizer for crops.



Climate and environmental sustainability



At Bornes’ farm, vegetables of all types are seen flourishing. Spinach, kale, and other traditional vegetables are healthy on the farms. The healthy-looking onions on the farm are good repellents. They protect other vegetables against invasion. Still, in this small farm, a hutch which houses rabbits is evident, and the goats are kept in a shaded goat house adjacent to the fish pond.

Climate and environmental sustainability

“For the goats, I graze them on a mixture of grass that I harvest while weeding the farm and Hazola. This combination is healthy animal feed,” said Bornes.

Despite the aridity, water scarcity is an issue of the past.

“I cover my fish pond with a shade net, which helps in protecting my pond by preventing foreign materials or animals from getting in,” she clarified. Korir does not use chemicals on her farms. Instead, she prepares organic pesticide by mixing plants such as Chili pepper, Sodom apple, Neem tree (mwarobaini) and garlic. The organic pesticide or insecticide safeguards crops from predators throughout the pollination cycle.

This traditional approach has made farming viable and profitable in Baringo. Prolonged droughts are no longer a hindrance.

Bornes uses shade nets to shield her crops against excessive heat. To combat the impacts of dry weather on her crops, she practices mulching and drip irrigation.

“I spread materials like leaves and grass on the soil to retain moisture and keep the ground hydrated. The drip irrigation approach ensures that all plants receive enough water directly to the roots without any wastage,” she said.

During the rare rainy seasons, she collects enough water for irrigation. The rainwater is tapped from the roof gutters and stored in huge tanks. The stored rainwater can sustain dry months, ensuring farms remain productive.

The fish pond is covered with a shade net to inhibit predatory access and reduce water evaporation.

The food trees planted around the farms give the environment a more refreshing look. Farmers through Bornes’ compound to benchmark his food forest. For promoting a healthy ecosystem around humans, nature is paying Bornes good money. Small vendors from Eldama Ravine Bornes’ farm to purchase vegetables for resale in the streets. She also exports Hazola to farmers in other counties in Kenya who own fish ponds. From her poultry, she profits from meat and eggs.

“I am managing all my bills, starting from paying school fees for my children, paying the workers on the farm, fueling my car, and other basics from this farm. So, I can say it is a profitable practice since I usually take my family for a short vacation during holidays,” she says with a smile.

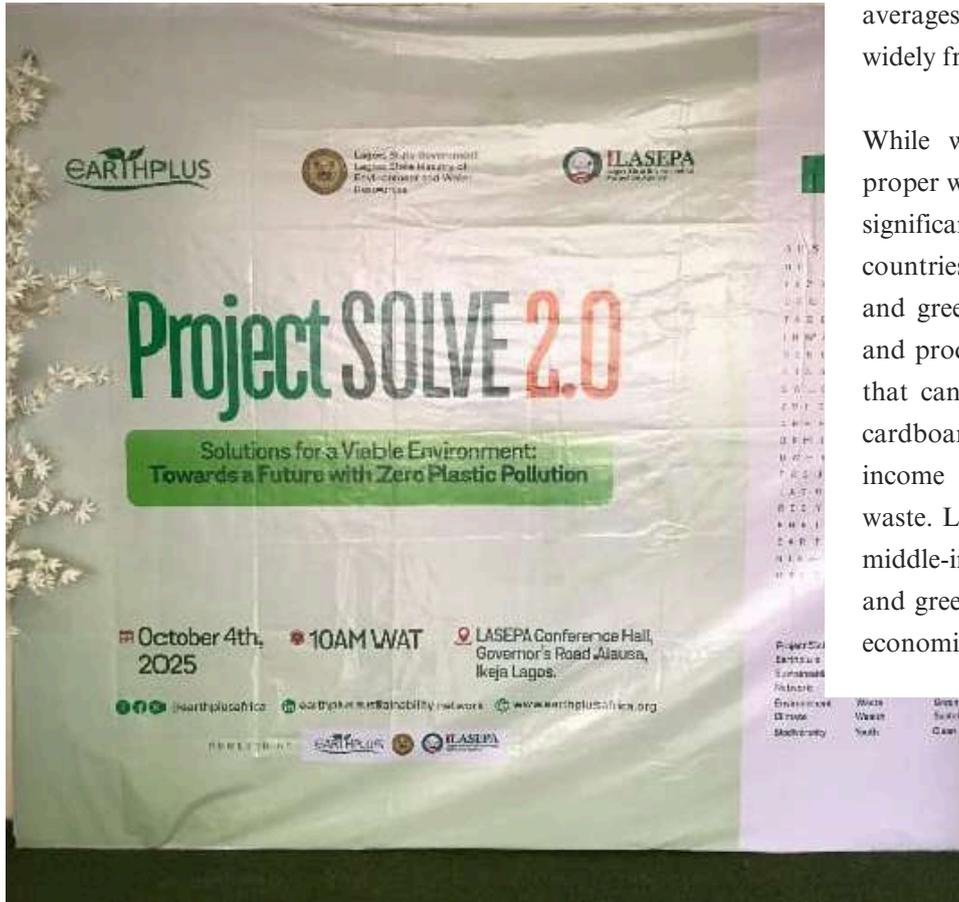
Agroecology is very cheap to start, as it is more of an organic farming. It means using the available resources at home without incurring any cost. For a food forest, one can get seeds from home groceries. The journey of Bornes Korir is more than a personal triumph. As the community continues to reap from her hard work, she is on a mission to expand. Her story drives hope and innovation in the surrounding.

As Bornes collects materials to prepare compost manure for her upcoming modern farm, we are reminded that there is no excuse for failing. Her practice is one of the pathways that can elevate Kenya and Africa to a food-secure state. As Kenya races against time to increase the forest cover and cushion the citizens against hunger, all generations, from youths to the elderly, are reminded to adopt climate-smart strategies to join in the national noble course. Aligning farming strategies with nature’s rhythm by cultivating not just crops is a rallying call.



BATTLE WITH WASTE: HOW EARTHPLUS IS SHAPING A NEW CLIMATE- CONSCIOUS GENERATION

By Ruth Adedeji, Lagos - Nigeria



Solid waste management remains a major challenge in Nigeria, largely due to rapid urbanization, population growth, inadequate infrastructure, weak policy enforcement and low public awareness. As a result of this combination, waste is often mismanaged, leading to serious environmental and health risks. Waste is commonly dumped illegally in unregulated sites. Piled heaps are openly burnt along highways and street corners.

Much of the waste ends up clogging drainage channels and waterways. This inappropriate disposal pollutes water sources, fouls the air and exposes communities to preventable diseases. Mosquitoes, rats and cockroaches thrive in such environments, increasing the risk of illnesses such as malaria, cholera and Lassa fever.

According to the World Bank's publication 'What a Waste 2.0: A Global Snapshot of Solid Waste Management to 2050', the world generates an estimated 2.01 billion tonnes of municipal solid waste each year. At least a third of that figure, considered conservative, is not managed in an environmentally safe manner. Globally, waste generated per person per day averages 0.74 kilograms, although this varies widely from 0.11 to 4.54 kilograms.

While waste collection is a crucial step in proper waste management, collection rates vary significantly across income levels. High-income countries generate a smaller proportion of food and green waste at 32 per cent of total waste and produce a much higher share of dry waste that can be recycled, including plastic, paper, cardboard, metal and glass. Low and middle-income countries generate far more organic waste. Low-income countries produce 53% and middle-income countries produce 57% of food and green waste. The waste proportion rises as economic development levels decline.

Nigeria remains the most malaria-endemic country in the world, accounting for 27% of global cases and 32% of malaria deaths, according to the 2021 World Malaria Report.

Another challenge is the low level of environmental literacy in many low-income neighbourhoods. A significant number of people have little understanding of the dangers associated with improper waste disposal. This highlights the need for sustained public education on waste sorting, recycling and responsible disposal. Such awareness could help shift behaviour towards a cleaner and more sustainable environment.

To bridge this environmental crisis, Earthplus Sustainability Network, a global non-profit organisation founded by Mr Caleb Adebayo, is promoting environmentally responsive governance and responsible citizenship.

Founded in May 2015, the organisation focuses on environmental protection and sustainable development, particularly within Africa. Driven by a commitment to sustainable practices and lifestyles, the organisation engages in advocacy, education and community initiatives designed to inspire positive environmental action.

Earthplus also operates through the United Nations Online Volunteering Service for the United Nations Environment Programme, extending its influence through global partnerships and volunteer-led projects.

To maintain momentum as change-makers, the organisation launched an annual initiative, Project SOLVE, which began in 2023. It aims to use teamwork and innovation to crowdsource practical solutions from young people for emerging environmental issues across African towns and cities.

The second edition, held on 4 October 2025, was themed Solutions for a Viable Environment: Towards a Future with Zero Plastic Pollution. Organised in collaboration with the Lagos State Ministry of Environment and Water Resources, the project targeted secondary school students in Lagos, Nigeria. Students were invited to submit project ideas addressing plastic pollution within their school communities, with the finalists presenting at the Earthplus 2025 National Youth Dialogue. Ten finalists emerged

from a big pool of public and private schools and were selected to pitch their ideas before a panel of judges. The event featured a pitch competition, panel discussions and a networking session, with keynote speakers addressing the theme.



Earthplus Sustainability Network training session

Oke-Ira Senior Grammar School emerged as the overall winner. The school presented an innovative project that transforms waste plastic bottles into greenhouses for growing vegetables and crops, offering both environmental benefits and support for urban agriculture.

Grandmates Schools, the runners-up, presented a project titled From Litters to Leaders, focusing on tackling plastic waste through creative recycling. Earthplus provided a platform for students to demonstrate their ideas and awarded the winning school 500,000 naira to implement their project. The organisation plans to monitor its progress to ensure it achieves meaningful impact.

During the event, a 15-year-old student from Oshodi Comprehensive Junior High School, Joshua Fapohunda, captured the audience's attention. Joshua had created a school bag made entirely from plastic bottle caps. He explained that his family's financial challenges meant they could not afford to buy him a bag. With his sister's support, he collected more than one thousand plastic caps and fashioned them into a functional bag. His creativity formed part of the event's memorable highlights.

Earthplus Deputy Team Lead, Mosadoluwa, noted that they want to see future generations carrying on the culture of environmental sustainability.

"We want to see that future generations continue with the culture of environmental sustainability and address plastic waste in their communities," Mosadoluwa said

In a bid to safeguard the environment, youths have been encouraged to harness creativity around waste management for income.



Project solve 2.0 innovation competition winners



Project solve 2.0 innovation competition presentation

How African Food Fellows are Fighting Hunger and Learning Inequality in Nairobi's Slums

By Melisa Mong'ina,
Nairobi - Kenya



How African Food Fellows are Fighting Hunger and Learning Inequality in Nairobi's Slums// Photo: Courtesy

In Nairobi's informal settlements, learners starve in classrooms. This hinders their concentration, which hampers holistic child development. Back at home, the situation is the same; parents struggle to fend for their families and often sleep on empty stomachs for lacking resources. To keep the children in school, African Food Fellowship (AFF), a dynamic network of leaders working on radical change to transform the food system in Africa, have joined hands. Focusing on the most affected areas of Nairobi, such as Mukuru kwa Njenga and Kwa Reuben, AFF is seeking to change the narrative.

Through their food system actions initiative, Feeding Futures, they aim not only to tackle food insecurity but also to strengthen education by supporting children to stay in school and excel in studies. The AFF's initiative aims for 100% school transition and high retention rates of learners.

Stephen Muthui, an African Food Fellow and organic farmer, explains how he and his colleagues, Sylvia Kuria and Julia Kamau, are working to strengthen the relationship between human beings, the environment, and animals. Together, they have been involved in advocacy and training sessions focusing on agroecology and organic farming.

‘Feeding Futures’ arose from noticeable gaps affecting marginalized groups living in urban slums.

“We practice sustainable agriculture called agroecology, trying to understand how human beings, the environment, and animals holistically benefit from each other. Feeding Futures was founded to address the needs of the ‘forgotten children’ and groups of people living in slum areas,” said Stephen, who added that these are people who do not have the luxury of choosing meals.

He further pointed out the abundance of organic foods in rural areas, yet it is often hard to find them in urban settings.

“When you go to the market, you want to buy a very nice-looking tomato or spinach. Consumers relate unappealing vegetables in the market to poor quality. We usually call them second-grade foods, and these often go to waste,” he adds. Stephen and his colleagues founded a project where “second-grade products” are channeled, an approach to curb wastage, while ensuring people have access to nutritious meals. The pilot project is expected to run in Mukuru slums. Through collaborative efforts with colleagues and stakeholders, they believe that their project will be a success.

“As a kid, if you’re optimally well nourished, you’re able to grow, and your brain develops as it should. Mukuru is our starting point, and with the stakeholders’ support, we will succeed,” said Stephen, who reiterated that they are involving schools in their projects.

The AFF’s initiatives, targeting less fortunate learners, have been a blessing to families. With plans to expand operations to Korogocho and other low-income neighbourhoods underway, the future of education has been brightened.

“As African Food Fellowship leaders, we believe that leadership means going where nobody else wants to go and doing things that nobody else wants to do. We are going to extend one school at a time, one institution at a time, and ensure that the children in slum areas are given the same privileges and honour as the others,” Stephen stressed.

Stephen acknowledges their collaboration with Mukuru Agri-business Association (MAA), comprising women traders engaging in organic produce trading and small-scale farming in Mukuru kwa Njenga. It is a collaboration that has breathed life into their vision of changing the lives of slum-dwellers.

“We are currently working with one school, which we’ve already enrolled. We have been having conversations since last year, so it is not something that started yesterday. We are happy to also collaborate with MAA,” he noted.

He mentions that they are reintroducing lost indigenous plants to uphold biodiversity conservation. They have also developed training schedules for farmers who have not yet adopted organic farming to create a sustainably thinking community. The initiative has impacted approximately 400 children in the urban slums with plans to reach more learners in the coming years.

“We have around 400 children. We have already started establishing training schedules with the farmers, and we will begin providing meals next year in schools,” Stephen hinted at some of the plans for AFF.

According to Ledama Masidza, the Connect and Food System Lead for the African Food Fellowship (AFF), Food System Actions (FSAs) projects go beyond just fixing visible challenges within the food system. They tackle deep structures of food systems that affect policy, power dynamics, incentives, relationships, and markets.

“FSAs look at how we address the conditions that produce these challenges, rather than just fixing the problems. This isn’t easy, especially in Kenya, a dynamic, complex country when it comes to food security, food policy, markets, actors, and the economy,” said Ledama.

He highlighted the challenges they faced when preparing for the Kenya Transform Food Festival 2025, particularly in mobilizing fellows to showcase meaningful projects and case studies. Over time, they managed to organize an expo where several Food System Actions were showcased.

Ledama commended the Feeding Futures projects by Stephen Muthui, Sylvia Kuria, and Julia Kamau, noting that they have reminded society of its collective responsibility of educating the next generation.

In a keynote speech, Stella Kimani, Senior Policy Manager at Food 4 Education, noted that food systems are rooted in the belief that Africans are capable of finding solutions to challenges affecting them. She emphasized leadership, collaboration, and courage as essential in bridging food system gaps in Kenya.



Buzstopboys: Young Volunteers Promoting a Clean Green Environment in Ghana

By Joshua Narh, Accra - Ghana

On a regular Saturday morning at Lapaz, a small community in Accra, Ghana's capital, an elderly man stood among a group of other middle-aged men over a gutter, filled with plastic waste and mud. He worked passionately, taking his time as he scooped out the debris with a shovel. The street was, as usual, busy with murmurs of passersby, hooting of cars and individuals minding their business.

However, the exercise of cleaning gutters drew the attention of a few because it was an unlikely engagement in Accra unless the District and Municipal Assemblies organised clean-up exercises.

The old man's volunteerism was motivated by Buzstopboys. He maintained that the kind of help communities needed to fight diseases, control flooding and combat other disasters was amongst them and that individuals had to make a concerted effort to improve their surroundings.

Although it was a straightforward comment, it revealed something deeper: a change in mindset. Their decision to clean that gutter was not an isolated act. Across the country, people had begun to take action in their own communities because of what they had seen young people achieve elsewhere. This is how one youth-led initiative became a national influence.

For more than two decades, waste management has been one of Ghana's biggest concerns. According to the United Nations' Interactive Country Fiches, the country generated more than 3,000 metric tonnes of plastic waste every day, amounting to about 1.1 million metric tons a year, and 86 per cent of this was unsustainably disposed.

This mismanagement appeared in visible ways: choked gutters, scattered plastic sachets, rubbish-filled streams and open dumping sites across the capital.

The situation had become part of everyday life in many communities. During the rainy season, drains overflowed because they could not carry water. Houses flooded, displacing people and damaging property, while roads became impassable.

Health issues such as cholera, typhoid and malaria persisted because of the state of the environment.

Another part of the problem was how people disposed of their waste. The UN reported that 11 per cent of the country's waste was burned, and burning plastic released substances that polluted the air and contributed to climate change.

For many families, especially in crowded urban areas, burning waste was normal because it was often the fastest way to get rid of it.





Heneba Kwadwo Safo, Founder - Buzstopboys// Photo: Joshua Narh

The challenge was not only about waste collection systems; it was also about attitudes towards waste. Many people still believed that cleaning the environment was mainly the work of government agencies or paid sanitation workers. This mindset had slowed community action and allowed filth to spread.

About two years ago, however, a group of young people in Accra decided to respond differently.

The Buzstopboys began as a simple effort by one young man, Oheneba Kwadwo Safo, and his girlfriend. They cleaned their first area at Mallam Junction in Accra, long before gaining social media attention. Their purpose was straightforward: to clean and set an example.

He later formed a small team with the help of a cameraman and two more volunteers. They documented their work and posted it online, partly to encourage others and partly to make sanitation a normal topic among young people.

The name Buzstopboys was chosen because bus stops are familiar spaces for everyone. Whether rich or poor, walking or driving, people passed through bus stops. It became a simple way to communicate that cleanliness was a shared responsibility.

Their philosophy was centred on two things: changing mindsets and leading by example. Oheneba explained that their main mission was to promote a clean and green environment through patriotism, volunteerism and selflessness.

They believed that a change in mindset naturally led to environmental responsibility. Instead of talking about what should be done, they showed what could be done by doing the work themselves.

“We want a change, but the change that we want, we are acting the change for those who watch to also know how exactly they can help,” Oheneba said.

They cleaned gutters, swept public spaces, desilted drains and collected plastic waste. They also spoke to community members, especially young people, about taking ownership of their environment. It had not been without challenges.



Before and after photos of a cleanup exercise by the Buzstopboys. Photos: Joshua Narh

But it has not been without challenges. Some people agree that the community is dirty but still insist that the government is responsible. Others want to help but lack equipment or logistics. Even when communities try to separate waste, collection trucks mix everything. Sometimes, the team can clean long stretches of drains, but does not have the trucks to dispose of the trash immediately.

Again, their work is not funded by any major organisation. They rely on small donations, little earnings from Facebook and YouTube, and occasional support from community members in the form of water, food, or small cash contributions.

But these challenges did not discourage them in any way, and their consistency has now attracted attention from local authorities, Members of Parliament, and even the President and foreign diplomats. But more importantly, it has attracted the attention of other young people.

A National Trend: Young Groups Picking Up the Tools

What began with a few people at a bus stop has now spread across the country. According to Oheneba Kwadwo Safo, more than 15 youth-led groups have formed because they were inspired by the Buzstopboys. Some of these include Uptown Cleaners in Ashaiman, Keep Kumasi Clean, Ashanti for Sanitation, and several others emerging in different communities and regions.

These groups are starting with little they have, often using tools from home or contributions from friends, just like the Buzstopboys. Many reach out to the BuzStopBoyz for guidance before beginning their activities. Once they start, they share their progress on social media and tag the group that inspired them.

This has created a small but active network of young environmental volunteers across different regions. The trend shows that when young people take visible action, others see what is possible.

The Pioneers' Focus on Mindset Change

As the originators of this fast-growing movement, the Buzstopboyz continue to preach mindset change. They believe that long-term environmental improvement depends on how people think about their surroundings.

Even when they return to places they have cleaned before, the results vary. Some communities keep the areas tidy. Others return to old habits. For the group, this is a sign that there is still work to do on public attitudes.

They also believe that maintenance is missing from many aspects of community life. As Oheneba explained, people often invest in new infrastructure but struggle to maintain it. He compares cleaning to brushing your teeth; it is not a one-time event but a daily responsibility.

“Cleaning is a daily activity that we must endeavour to do on a daily basis. For the same reason, we have been brushing our teeth from childhood and we still do even at the point of death, we're still brushing our teeth. So that's how we see,” he explained.

If they had more resources, Oheneba says the group would establish local cleaning units within communities. These units would include young people who live in the area, equipped with proper tools and supported financially. They would be responsible for keeping their immediate environment clean every day. He believes that if this model works in one community, it can be replicated across the country.

Impact: Measuring Change Beyond Clean Drains

The Buzstopboyz measure their success through involvement. They look at how many people decide to take action because of what they have seen. For them, the increasing number of youth groups across Ghana is one of their biggest achievements.

They also observe how conversations on sanitation have become more common in the country. More young people talk about environmental issues online. More communities recognise the link between cleanliness and health.

“I am actually measuring by the number of people who are getting involved. And even the fact that even if you have studied our country recently in Ghana, you realize that a lot of the conversation is not centered around sanitation”, he said

Lessons and Replicability: What Others Can Learn

Over the years, the Buzstopboyz have learned that change takes time, but people respond when they see consistency; leading by example is more effective than arguing or lecturing. Youth activism is powerful when it is grounded in simple, practical actions, and communities improve faster when residents participate directly.



The Buzstopboyz and other volunteers undertaking a clean up exercise in a community in Accra!
 Photo: Joshua Narh

Lessons and Replicability: What Others Can Learn

Over the years, the Buzstopboyz have learned that change takes time, but people respond when they see consistency; leading by example is more effective than arguing or lecturing. Youth activism is powerful when it is grounded in simple, practical actions, and communities improve faster when residents participate directly.

Their model is not dependent on high budgets or complicated structures but on availability, willingness, and a clear sense of responsibility. Because of this, it can be replicated in many places across Africa.

Youth Leading Africa’s Environmental Future

Environmental challenges are not unique to Ghana. Many African countries struggle with waste management, plastic pollution, and weak disposal systems. The Buzstopboyz represent a growing trend on the continent, young people taking the lead in solving community problems.

Their work connects to broader goals of sustainability, community development, and climate action. It also shows that African youth are not waiting for perfect conditions. They are creating change with available tools, shared motivation, and public involvement.

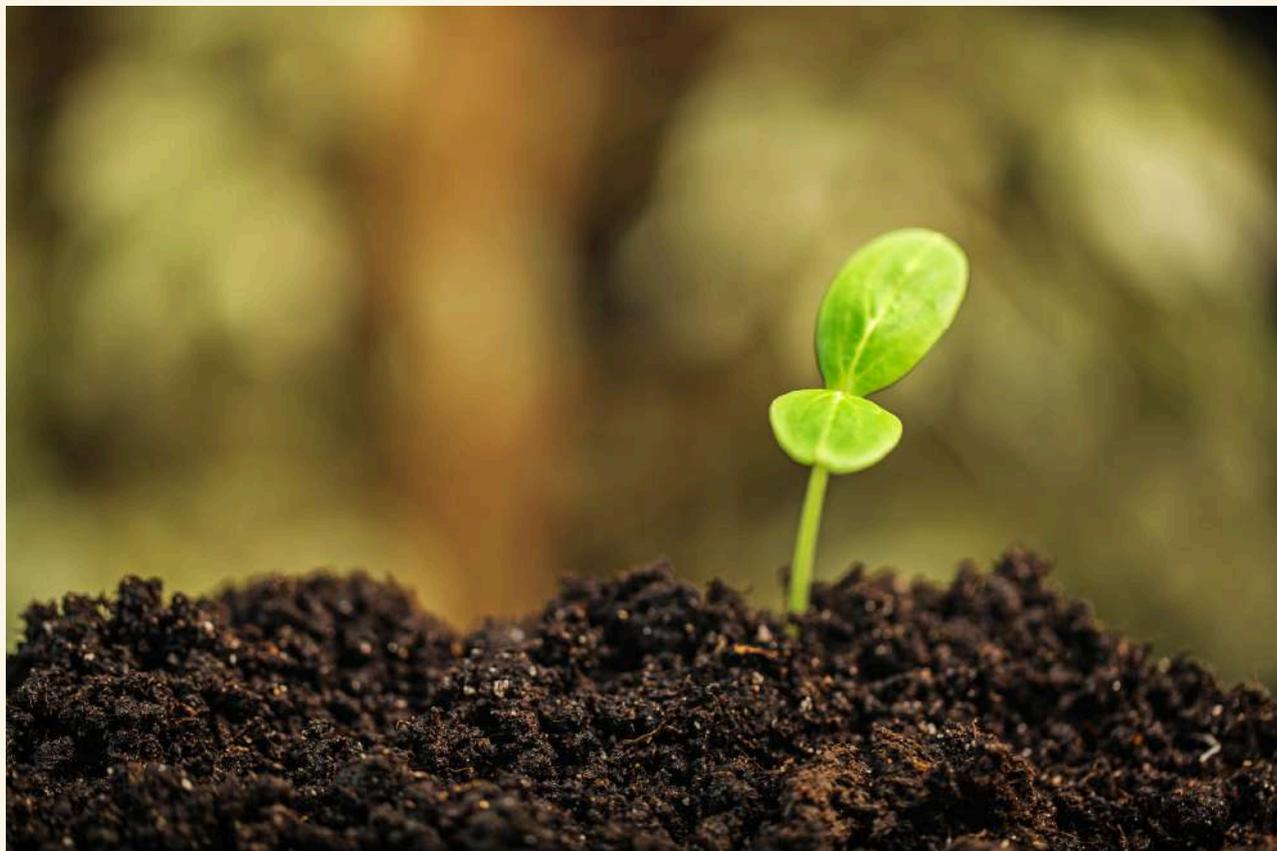
What the Message Really Is

At the core of this initiative is a reminder that the environment affects everyone. As Oheneba explained, sickness does not check age or wealth. When the surroundings become unhealthy, everyone feels the impact. “A typical example is what happened during COVID-19, the rich, the poor, all of us were quickly running for no snacks. Others were running for herbal medications and whatnot. So it means that the environment doesn't care whether you are young or old”, he said..

Oheneba continued that “Once it goes bad, all of us will be hot. If we should wake up tomorrow and the environment is dying, it simply means that humans are equally dying because our sustainability and the life we are living here on earth is not something that we are living out of assumption. We are breathing because there is a tree giving us oxygen”. The elderly man at Lapaz is proof that inspiration can come from anywhere. Sometimes, people simply need to see someone else take the first step. And through the work of the Buzstopboyz, many people across Ghana are taking their own steps consistently and with a belief that they can help shape cleaner communities.

INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN REMOTE KENYA RESTORING LAND AFTER YEARS OF DEGRADATION

By [Maureen Chesang](#), Baringo - Kenya



Healthy land is essential for healthy communities.// Photo: Courtesy

Monicah Yator reflects on her early life, which was filled with struggles similar to those faced by many women in indigenous communities.

Growing up in Baringo, she recalls witnessing the harsh effects of climate change alongside harmful cultural practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM), gender-based violence (GBV), early marriage, and school dropout.

These realities affect many indigenous communities across Africa and are further worsened by global warming, with semi-arid areas being hit the hardest.

Some of these challenges arise from climate shifts, while others result from harmful human activities.

As land productivity declines, access to resources becomes increasingly unequal, leaving many families vulnerable.

Amid resilience and struggle, with grazing fields shrinking and water sources disappearing, Monicah led her community in Marigat, Baringo County, Kenya, to form the Indigenous Women and Girls Initiative (IWGI).

Founded in 2019, this women-led, community-based organisation aims to turn hardship into opportunity and restore dignity to those affected by environmental and social injustices.

“We started IWGI because women in these communities carry the heaviest burden,” Yator says. “But they also hold the deepest knowledge, the strongest resilience, and the best solutions.”

Since its inception, IWGI has become a symbol of hope within the community, promoting education for girls and empowering women across Baringo and neighbouring counties such as Turkana and Elgeyo Marakwet.

Through agro ecology, permaculture, gender empowerment, and policy advocacy, the organisation is changing the narrative of indigenous communities by placing them at the forefront of climate resilience and action.

IWGI believes that healthy land is essential for healthy communities.

In Baringo, years of soil degradation, erratic rainfall, and prolonged droughts have weakened ecosystems and threatened livelihoods.

Yet indigenous cultures possess centuries-old knowledge of land stewardship, which, when adapted, can restore biodiversity through regenerative farming.

IWGI seeks to modernise and enhance this knowledge rather than discard it.

“We don’t teach communities to abandon their traditions; we help them strengthen those traditions using agro ecology and permaculture so they can feed their families with dignity,” Yator explains.

Women farmers are trained in sustainable grazing management, indigenous seed preservation, natural pest control, agroforestry, water harvesting, and permaculture.

These practices rely on locally available resources, enabling farmers to produce food sustainably without depending on costly chemical fertilisers and pesticides.

Since 2019, IWGI has trained more than 1,700 farmers from communities including Kiptingilon, Endorois, Sambalat, Kibingor, and Machakos County.

Participants gain practical tools to restore degraded land and improve food security at both household and community levels.

IWGI has also established agroforestry centres that serve as learning spaces and seed banks, managed entirely by women's groups.

These centres preserve and exchange indigenous seeds such as sorghum, finger millet, cowpeas, and drought-resistant vegetables, helping to protect biodiversity and strengthen local food systems.

The organisation is investing in the next generation by introducing modern farming practices in schools.

At Sambalat, Tangelbei, Noiywet, and Marigat Comprehensive Schools, students learn how soil, water, plants, and animals work together within healthy ecosystems.

These school farms ensure that indigenous knowledge and environmental stewardship are passed on.

Through partnerships with local grazing committees in Salabani and the Lake Baringo cluster, the organisation trains pastoralists in rangeland restoration and drought-resistant pasture management.

“Indigenous communities understand the land; they just need the tools to protect that knowledge,” Yator says.

IWGI advocates for indigenous voices in climate discussions and is part of networks such as the Indigenous Women Council, Climate Change Working Group–Kenya, the Global Landscapes Forum, and the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa.

These efforts help indigenous women move from the margins to the centre of climate action, enabling them to shape solutions.

The organisation also links climate justice with gender justice, recognising that women are often the most affected by both climate change and social inequalities.

It has conducted leadership and policy advocacy training in Nakuru and Marigat, equipping more than 100 women with skills in climate policy, governance, and the prevention of gender-based violence.

These forums empower women to participate confidently in decision-making spaces and influence local development agendas.

At the same time, IWGI challenges harmful cultural practices such as early marriage, female genital mutilation, domestic violence, and the denial of women's land rights.

“Women cannot lead climate action if they are silenced by violence. When women are empowered, they create healthier environments for everyone.” She emphasises.

The organisation complements this work with health education programmes focused on child rights, sexual and reproductive health, menstrual hygiene, and environmental health.



With land restoration remaining a core part of IWGI's mission, the organisation has planted more than 60,000 trees across its project areas, contributing to biodiversity conservation, reducing soil erosion, and revitalising water catchments.

However, challenges such as land grabbing, insecure land tenure, and development pressures continue to threaten indigenous communities and their ancestral lands.

“Land is more than property; it is identity, culture, and memory. When you lose land, you lose everything.” Yator states.

In response, they continue to work with partners to protect land rights, uphold traditional resource management practices, and ensure community participation in land-related policies.

Although the IWGI demonstrates that community-led solutions are both practical and powerful, their work is far from finished as more women need training, more land requires restoration, and more voices must be heard.

Yator says that they are actively seeking volunteers, partners, and supporters to expand the IWGI's impact.



HOW NIGERIAN NANSEL JOEL IS BRIDGING AFRICA'S YOUTH LEADERSHIP GAP

By Daniel Odhiambo, Nairobi - Kenya

Africa has the youngest population in the world, with more than 60% under the age of 25. Despite this demographic advantage, young people remain significantly underrepresented in leadership across political, social, and economic spheres.

Many face persistent barriers, including limited access to mentorship, few leadership development opportunities, and a lack of structured guidance to realise their potential. According to the African Development Bank, these gaps underscore the urgent need for programmes that equip African youth with practical leadership skills.

It is within this context that Nansel Joel, founder of Inspire and Impact Africa, has committed himself to nurturing a generation of purpose-driven leaders across the continent. Growing up in Langtan, Plateau State, Nigeria, Joel experienced first-hand the effects of limited resources and guidance. These challenges, he says, shaped his resolve to mentor, inspire, and empower young Africans to take charge of their futures.

Joel's journey into youth leadership began after completing high school, when he encountered *In Pursuit of Purpose* by Dr Myles Munroe. The book reshaped his outlook on life, emphasising intentional living, self-discovery, and the importance of unlocking one's potential. He applied these principles to his own life, laying the foundation for a vision of youth empowerment that has since expanded beyond Nigeria.

Through Inspire and Impact Africa, Joel has built a platform that delivers conferences, mentorship programmes, and fellowships designed to guide young people towards meaningful leadership paths.

The initiative emphasises critical thinking, personal responsibility, and ethical leadership, equipping participants to navigate the complexities of modern African societies. Reading forms a central pillar of the programme, with structured engagement around books used to sharpen thinking, broaden perspectives, and strengthen strategic capacity.

While many young Africans graduate with academic qualifications, they often lack essential life skills such as adaptability, emotional intelligence, and strategic decision-making.

Inspire and Impact Africa bridges this gap through mentorship and exposure to leadership principles that are frequently inaccessible, particularly for youth in rural and underserved communities.

His work extends beyond Nigeria through digital platforms that connect young people across the continent. Virtual coaching sessions, online mentorship, and collaborative initiatives enable participants to exchange ideas, build networks, and develop leadership competencies. One notable initiative is a reading community of more than 200 young people who regularly engage in discussions on leadership, productivity, and personal growth.

The organisation also runs fellowship programmes that provide young leaders with practical leadership experience through community-based projects.

These initiatives cultivate discipline, problem-solving skills, and accountability, preparing participants to address real-world challenges and drive grassroots change.

The long-term vision of Inspire and Impact Africa is to nurture a generation of leaders who act with integrity, clarity, and compassion.

He stresses that leadership is not defined by position, but by responsibility, the responsibility to serve communities, advance social good, and contribute to sustainable development.

His efforts have gained recognition as he was inaugurated as a member of the Humanitarian Leaders Network (Youth Wing), a milestone that reflects both personal achievement and the growing impact of Inspire and Impact Africa across Africa.

Despite this progress, Joel remains focused on expanding access to mentorship and leadership development.

He identifies ongoing challenges such as limited access to reading materials, insufficient exposure to leadership role

models, and the inadequate integration of soft skills into formal education systems.

To address these gaps, he advocates for mobile libraries, digital learning platforms, and policies that promote reading and personal development as foundational tools for youth empowerment.

Joel also encourages young people to take ownership of their growth through reflection, disciplined study, and purposeful action.

“I want young Africans to see themselves as architects of change,” he says. “Purpose-driven leadership begins with understanding your potential and using it to serve others effectively.”

Through Inspire and Impact Africa, Joel has created spaces where young people can practise leadership, mentorship, and civic engagement.

Alumni of the programmes are applying their skills to challenges in education, governance, and community development.

Complementing his mentorship work, Joel is developing books, workbooks, and short courses aimed at equipping African youth with practical tools for self-development and leadership.

By combining knowledge with application, he ensures that young leaders are prepared to lead with both competence and character.

Through Inspire and Impact Africa, Joel continues to equip young Africans with the tools needed to influence decision-making, strengthen communities, and contribute meaningfully to the continent’s development.



As part of his efforts to Equip the young people with the necessary information, Wordsmith also believe in the power of books as a tool for influence and impact. At an outreach, he shares books with teenagers and secondary school students. // Photo: courtesy

How Future of Hope Foundation is Empowering Zimbabwean Youths through Mushroom Farming

By Colen Maenda, Harare - Zimbabwe

The Future of Hope Foundation, a non-governmental organisation headquartered in Zimbabwe, is a living testament to resilience, innovation, and the transformative power of sustainable livelihoods. The organisation was founded in 2013.

Today, the Foundation's footprint stretches far beyond Zimbabwe. It has trained more than 1000 women in mushroom cultivation across the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, South Africa, and Mozambique, among other countries. Its influence has also crossed continents—reaching indigenous communities in Australia and schools in India, where mushroom hubs are being adopted as tools for food security, income generation, and climate resilience.

This model aligns closely with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals—advancing Zero Hunger (SDG 2) by improving nutrition and food access; Gender Equality (SDG 5) by economically empowering women and youth; and Climate Action (SDG 13) through a waste-to-mushroom cycle that reduces emissions while building local resilience.

These accomplishments reflect the Foundation's mission: to capacitate, collaborate with, support, and mentor marginalised and vulnerable communities through entrepreneurship and self-development. By facilitating research, training, and innovation in sustainable food systems, the organisation is creating pathways to nutrition, income security, and human potential—one mushroom hub at a time.

At the heart of the Foundation is the remarkable story of its founder, Mrs Chido Govera. Mrs Govera grew up as an orphan, experiencing hardships not limited to hunger. Despite this, she transformed her ordeal into an empowering testimony of sustainability through mushrooms commonly found in most areas of Zimbabwe, especially in the rainy season. While still young, Mrs Govera had to fend for her siblings and learn adult tasks for survival.

What could have broken her instead became the seed of an extraordinary breakthrough after being introduced to Oyster mushroom farming using maize stalk waste. She learnt the art of growing mushrooms at her residence, turning a humble fungus into a lifeline for her family and others in the community. As a young professional, she later refined the art of growing mushrooms with coffee grounds, a technique she pioneered and is now spreading worldwide.

This mushroom-powered movement is now feeding thousands, funding education, empowering the less privileged and awakening a sleeping billion-dollar industry across Africa. Indeed, it is a true weapon for social change.

Oyster mushrooms stand out as a tool for food security and generate income. Among all mushroom species, this variety matures faster than the others, taking about 2 to 4 weeks to mature. It sustains livelihood and provides a quick, ready and steady cash flow that cannot be realised from slow-growing crops, which

take longer before maturity. Cultivation of Oyster mushrooms thrives on agricultural and natural waste. Farmers use what is already lying around, turning waste into valuable commodities for sustainability.

A kilogram of Oyster mushrooms requires only a small amount of water, which makes the plant suitable for drought-prone areas. Food is guaranteed even when the rains fail. Mushrooms generally provide a rich source of various nutrients for both children and adults. They are sources of vitamins D, B, iron and zinc also suitable for pregnant women in food-insecure families. Additionally, they constitute cheap ways of addressing nutritional gaps.

It is gratifying to note that by promoting mushroom cultivation, Future of Hope Foundation is re-populating the environment for the good of mankind. In a wide-ranging interview at Christon Bank, where Future of Hope Foundation is headquartered, Mrs Govera indicated that mushroom production has its fair



Future of hope foundation founder Mrs Chido Govera// Photo: Courtesy

share of challenges and chief among them is access to mother spawn culture, which enhances the cultivation of mushrooms. Currently, Zimbabwean mushroom farmers are relying on South Africa and Belgium for mother spawn culture production, which is negatively impacting sustained production.

The Foundation has therefore evolved strategies aimed at bridging the gap that exists for the networks of women and youth groups to access spawn culture that allows for the production of Oyster mushrooms at a relatively low cost.

Solution

As part of the strategies to address the challenge, Future of Hope has established its mushroom spawn lab housed in a re-purposed shipping container where participants from across Zimbabwe and beyond learn the science and art of spawn production. Additionally, Future of Hope and its partners have launched the Zimbabwe Mushroom Spawn Solutions, which aims to empower mushroom farmers through local mother spawn production.

Various spawn producers and representatives of key line ministries will be sharing knowledge to establish a resilient and self-sufficient mushroom value chain in Zimbabwe, thereby reducing reliance on imported material and facilitating preservation.

Over twenty fungi culture entrepreneurs are expected to undergo the training. The programme was made possible through funding by the European Union and the Global Diaspora Facility of the International Centre for Migration Policy Development [ICMPD].

The Programmes Manager of the Foundation's Christon Bank site, Mr Musariri Diza explained that “As a stopgap measure, Future of Hope had already started training some lead farmers in mother spawn production and multiplication to improve access to mushroom spawn in the areas where we have established mushroom cultivation hubs.”

The training, he said, will provide knowledge that will strengthen local mother spawn production capacity, as well as establish two mother Spawn Centres of Expertise. It will also help develop a shared open-source mother spawn bank and establish a platform for mother spawn distribution, thereby entrenching the Future of Hope Foundation's mission of empowerment and sustainability.

“With this project, we are bringing different players in spawn production and training them in advanced techniques that not only allow for spawn production but also cover strain selection, development and preservation. These new skills will enable us to venture into conservation of our local fungi in nature, Mrs Govera added.

According to Future of Hope Foundation, the global mushroom business is estimated at around \$50 billion, and the African market sector is valued at \$152 million, which is far lower than the global figure, meaning the market is waiting to be fully tapped.

Zimbabwe's mushroom market size and growth are relatively small, fairly fragmented, with commercial farmers on one side and social-enterprise out-growers of women and youth groups feeding into the same chain.

That is why the Future of Hope Foundation has taken significant steps and established community projects in various parts of the country and region with established trainers in most areas. There are over sixty-five [65] community projects, over two hundred [200] community members and over five thousand [5,000] beneficiaries of the project.

In Zimbabwe, a group of women were fully equipped with the resources and is producing enough for consumption and sale. In Manicaland in Mutare town, a beneficiary, Mrs Locadi Pudurai, is doing the venture with her family under Javangwe Mushrooms. She harvests about 20-30 pallets, which she packages into 200-gram (g) packs and sells to local people and travellers in Mutare town.

“I earn enough to cover everything that we need here at home and pay for my children's education fees. The major problem we face is the acquisition of the spawn culture and contamination. We acquire our spawn culture from Harare, which is far away, which sometimes results in contamination of the spawn culture, and we lose a lot,” Mrs Pudurai said.

In Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second-largest city, Mrs Irene Sibanda is one of the beneficiaries of Future of Hope Foundation's interventions. She went to Belgium to learn about Oyster mushroom production. She is now running her own Oyster mushroom hub at home and in another suburb in Hillside. She said, “I train people who want to venture into Oyster mushroom farming in and around Bulawayo for a fee, as I am now a stand-alone entity, thanks to the Future of Hope Foundation programme by Aunt Chido. Oyster mushroom cultivation is a profitable business venture and easy to manage.

In mid-Zambezi, home to the predominantly Korekore people, in Mbire, the Utariri Integrated Biodiversity Climate and Livelihoods Programme, funded by the Swedish Embassy in Zimbabwe, is supporting households. Over twelve thousand [12,000] households are beneficiaries of the programme.

The Utariri Communications Programmes Officer, Mrs Patience Ukama, indicated that the community initiatives have secured livelihoods through sustainable projects such as mushroom production and community gardens.

Kenyan Coast-Based Journalist turns from Frontline Witness of Injustice to A Champion of Communal Justice

By Polycarp Ochieng, Kilifi - Kenya

For years, Ms Treeza Auma, a seasoned journalist based in Kilifi County on Kenya's coast, documented the raw, daily toll of climate change. These were not abstract headlines; they were broken families in dilapidated shacks, children scavenging for scraps, and communities collapsing under environmental strain.

She witnessed floods swallowing homesteads, droughts turning fertile land to dust, and hunger gripping entire villages. Climate distress fueled desperation, which in turn amplified social ills such as the abuse of elderly people. But what broke her most were the brutal killings and mutilations of elderly men and women accused of witchcraft. Many elders, chased from ancestral homes, became homeless, seeking refuge under trees or in roofless structures.

According to BBC reports, elders who are traditionally revered as wisdom-keepers were instead being hunted, with one killed every week along Kenya's coast. In Kilifi alone, over 138 elders were murdered between 2020 and mid-2022, driven by land disputes, poverty, and superstition, according to Haki Yetu, a human rights organisation in Kenya.

For Auma, these injustices became impossible to ignore. "We could no longer just watch," she recalls. "Charity wasn't enough. We needed sustainable solutions that restored both material needs and human dignity."

In 2023, Auma co-founded Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Action Aid (PESAID), officially registered in April 2024 as a humanitarian Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) under Kenya's NGO Act.

In Magarini, nearly every homestead seemed affected. "We even raised concerns urging researchers and government officials to investigate what might be happening," she recalls. Stigma, neglect, and exclusion created lifelong mental-health challenges.

"We founded PESAID after witnessing deep-rooted injustices," Auma says. "Elderly people were being abused, mutilated, killed, or evicted from their homes. Some were living in deplorable conditions without proper shelter or basic amenities."

She emphasises that journalism exposed the interconnectedness of these crises.

The name PESAID itself blends the Swahili word Pesa, meaning money. Aid symbolises practical and deeper meaning reflecting both material and psychosocial support. Beyond the elderly, Auma repeatedly encountered persons with disabilities (PWDs) living in isolation, especially in Kilifi, where children with disabilities were often hidden by families and denied education.

These issues were not new," she notes, "but had persisted for so long that they felt normal; yet, no consistent, community-centred solutions existed. That gap became PESAID's purpose".



Treeza Auma attending the World Second Summit for Social Development and the First Leaders' Meeting of the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty// Photo: PESAID

Immediately after its formation, PESAID mapped out interventions to restore dignity among marginalised groups. PESAID spearheaded and co-chaired Kenya's first Steering Committee Against Elderly Killings in Kilifi County, playing a pivotal role in multi-agency awareness and protection efforts. This aimed to counter more than 100 annual witchcraft-related murders reported in coastal and western Kenya.

The organisation launched the Mudzini Mudzo safe-home at Kaya Godoma in Ganze, which is now a refuge for displaced elders who receive shelter, regular meals, and healthcare. The programme provides dignity, care, and security for society's outcasts.

The third aspect PESAID initiated was supporting livelihood initiatives among elderly people, such as beekeeping in Siaya County, promoting

economic empowerment while addressing climate challenges. Furthermore, PESAID collaborates with networks like the Kilifi County Disability Network to advocate for disability-inclusive policies and promote accountability.

While the organisation began in Kilifi, similar injustices across the country pushed PESAID to expand. The organisation now runs pilot programmes in seven counties: Migori, Kisii, Kilifi, Mombasa, Nairobi, Siaya and Kajiado. In Migori, PESAID is campaigning against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) among the Kuria community, whereas in Kisii and Kilifi, it is focused on combating elderly killings and PWD abuse.

In Siaya, the organisation is supporting neglected elderly persons with sustainable projects like beekeeping, while delivering Sexual



Faith Ongiri, PESAID's programmes officer, is seen participating in an environmental cleaning exercise in Nairobi. Photo: PESAID

Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) education to youth in slums like Kibera, Mathare, and Kaloleni in Nairobi. PESAID is also working with climate actors on adaptation and resilience in both Mombasa and Kajiado counties.

Faith Ongiri, PESAID's Programmes Officer, notes that youths from low-income backgrounds lack access to basic SRHR information because most messages are school-based.

"We started outreach programmes targeting out-of-school youth to ensure they too understand their rights, health, and how to protect themselves," she explains.

Mental-health support is integrated due to the emotional strain of poverty and stigma. PESAID's SRHR programmes also run in counties with high adolescent pregnancy and HIV rates. In climate-vulnerable zones, the organisation introduces adaptation projects, sustainable farming, and resilience workshops to address floods, droughts, and ecological grief, echoing Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)13.

Faith Ongiri describes PESAID's approach as holistic. When distributing sanitary kits to adolescent girls, for example, they engage caregivers and siblings to build community awareness.

"We don't isolate issues; we address them collectively," she emphasises.

Unlike organisations that rely solely on aid, PESAID blends care, empowerment and advocacy. They equip communities with skills to generate income, promote self-reliance, and participate in local projects, making interventions sustainable. Auma's personal encounters with the suffering of elderly people, Persons With Disabilities (PWDs), and homeless victims of communal brutality fueled her commitment to action. Ongiri adds her own story, filled with emotions but inspiring. "As a mother of a child with disability, I was inspired to advocate for inclusive education. Every time I connect a parent to a therapist or school and see hope return, I know why this work matters," she stated.



Banner from the International day for elderly persons// Photo: PESAIID

Despite being under two years old and largely unfunded, PESAIID’s impact is substantial. The organisation has recorded over 100 elderly people who have benefited directly from the Mudzini Mudzo safe-home, accessing regular meals, medical care, and supportive community networks. Similarly, PWDs in Siaya and Kilifi have begun small income-generating activities such as kitchen gardening.

On SRHR, hundreds of youths have gained SRHR and mental-health knowledge, while hundreds of out-of-school youths have been informed through PESAIID’s outreach. PESAIID co-chaired the first-ever national steering committee against elderly killings in Kilifi.

What began as grassroots visits to vulnerable families in Kilifi has become a multi-county movement addressing poverty’s interconnected crises. PESAIID’s mantra, “More than just help,” reflects its blend of immediate relief, food, shelter, and cash, with long-term tools like skills training, trauma counselling, and community networks.

Their reach now covers hotspots across Kisii, Siaya, Migori, Nairobi, and Mombasa.

Despite this expansion, one major challenge remains: data tracking. Ongiri admits that inadequate monitoring and documentation have made it hard to showcase its full impact. Strengthening reporting systems and amplifying grassroots stories is a key priority. Ongiri also hopes to expand community participation in dialogues and policy forums.

“It’s important that the elderly, youth, and PWDs have their voices heard in decision-making spaces, she observed.



Treeza Auma founder Pesaid with disabled community members at Kaya Godamal// Photo: PESAIID

Partnerships for greater impact

PESAIID recognises that government, youth, and private-sector collaboration is vital. They work with county officials, schools, churches, and health facilities to align programmes with government development plans. Their partnerships with Youth are central to mobilisation, climate action, and SRHR outreach. This helps in bringing energy and innovation.

In the private sector, companies aid them in supporting training, technology, and market linkages for community-based livelihoods. PESAIID’s programmes align with SDG 3, SDG 5, and Agenda 2063. In under two years, the organisation has reached thousands, building self-reliance in underserved communities. Their work embodies Africa’s vision of a resilient, inclusive, and prosperous future, where no one is left behind. Concurrently, by protecting the elderly, uplifting PWDs, equipping youth with knowledge, and fostering climate-resilient livelihoods, PESAIID proves that the most powerful revolutions often begin with people who refuse to look away.



PESAIID CEO attending the Blooming Bud Centre and other partners to commemorate World Autism Awareness Day// Photo: PESAIID

AFRICA'S NEW INNOVATION FRONTIERS: UNIVERSITIES TRANSFORMING RESEARCH INTO REAL-WORLD IMPACT

By Akere-Maimo J. Ano-Ebie, Yaoundé - Cameroon

Across Africa, a stark paradox defines the higher education landscape. Universities produce graduates, yet industries suffer a shortage of skills. A 2023 World Bank report estimates that while 12 million youth enter the African workforce each year, only 3 million find stable employment, highlighting a critical mismatch between training and economic needs. This sharp difference is fueled by an “innovation valley of death,” where academic research rarely translates into commercial products or scalable solutions.

It is in this context of potential and paralysis that a transformative wave is building, spearheaded by a new breed of academic institutions in Cameroon. The Fobang Institutes for Innovations in Science & Technology (FINISTECH) and The ICT University are not merely adding to the number of universities;

they are systematically dismantling the old model. They represent a powerful, parallel response, forging a new paradigm where the campus serves as a workshop, the curriculum acts as a launchpad, and the degree serves as a blueprint for tangible impact.

The traditional African university has long been faulted for its heavy tilt toward theory over practice. According to the UNESCO Science Report, Sub-Saharan Africa, home to 13.4% of the world's population, produces less than 1% of global research and development output. This gap is not a reflection of intellectual shortage but of limited infrastructure, weak industry linkages, and an academic culture that rewards publication rather than practical problem-solving. Much of the research that is produced remains locked in academic journals, while graduates are trained for a formal job market far too narrow to absorb them.



Prof Jaques Fame Ndongo the Minister of Higher Education & Olusegun Obasanjo the former Nigerian President// Photo: Courtesy

It is into this stagnant landscape that FINISTECH and The ICT University have stepped with purposeful disruption. Their models are grounded in translational research, a deliberate and often demanding process of converting laboratory insights into usable solutions, strengthened by industry-aligned professional training. Together, they are redefining what an African university can be: a catalyst for innovation, enterprise, and economic transformation.

Founded in 2021, FINISTECH operates with the mission to engineer the physical and biological foundations of African self-reliance. Its approach is a direct antidote to the “research-for-publication” cycle. In its specialized labs for bioengineering, renewable energy, and automated manufacturing, the question is not just “Is it scientifically sound?” but “Can it be built, deployed, and maintained here?”



Keen students receiving lectures in ultra-modern classrooms at ICT-U// Photo: Courtesy

A student in Bioengineering is not just studying microbiology; they are exploring how to use local bio-resources to create biodegradable packaging, reducing both waste and import dependency. A project in Energy Systems is directly linked to designing affordable, decentralized solar micro-grids for rural communities, a key hurdle in Africa's electrification.

“We are redefining the future of specialized higher education by empowering the next generation to be builders,” says Professor Wilfred F. Mbacham, FINISTECH's President. The institute's impact is measured by its graduates' ability to bridge the continent's massive infrastructure deficit, a goal aligned with the African Development Bank's priority to localize industrial capabilities and stimulate a green manufacturing revolution.

FINISTECH translates lab science, the ICT University translates data into development. For over a decade, its philosophy has been to create “job creators, not job seekers.” In an era defined by the Fourth Industrial Revolution, ICT-U’s model addresses a critical gap: the digital skills rift. The International Finance Corporation projects that by 2030, 230 million jobs in Sub-Saharan Africa will require digital skills—a target currently far out of reach.

ICT-U’s response is total immersion in applied digital innovation. Its curriculum in AI, cybersecurity, and data science is not taught in a vacuum. Students use real-world data from Cameroonian farms for their agri-tech projects, develop fintech solutions for the unbanked, and design e-governance platforms to improve public service delivery.

Their recent partnership with Brazil’s Lavras State University on an e-agriculture initiative exemplifies this approach. It is not just a research paper; it is an operational plan to integrate AI, robotics, and drones to modernize farming, targeting the creation of 10,000 youth jobs. This is translational research that directly targets agricultural productivity, a sector employing over 50% of Africa’s population but plagued by inefficiency.

The existence of these two institutions signals a profound shift with tangible implications for Africa’s development trajectory. By fostering innovation in high-value sectors like agri-tech, biotech, and fintech, they help move African economies beyond raw material extraction. FINISTECH engineers build the machines for local processing, while ICT-U graduates create the software to optimize supply chains.

Their “creator” ethos is crucial. The African Centre for Economic Transformation notes that SMEs are the continent’s largest employers. By equipping graduates to launch startups, whether in medical device assembly or cybersecurity consulting, they create a job multiplier effect far exceeding the impact of training for existing roles.

Many global technologies fail in Africa due to a lack of contextual adaptation. These universities produce problem-solvers rooted in their environment. An ICT-U graduate designs a mobile payment system for low-network areas, while a FINISTECH bioengineer develops a solar-powered medical cooler that functions reliably through power outages. This is translational research ensuring innovation actually reaches the people who need it.

The challenge of scaling these models remains, requiring sustained investment and policy support. Yet, in the determined hum of FINISTECH’s laboratories and the focused click of keyboards at ICT University, the outline of a new African future is visible. They are proving that the continent’s greatest untapped resource is not beneath its soil but within the minds of its youth when given the tools to translate their ideas into impact.



Group photo_Dr Chief Olusegun Obasanjo honoured as a Keynote Speaker at ICT-U// Photo: Courtesy

WOMEN IN POTTERY:

SWOPA UNEARTHS THE POTENTIAL AND CREATIVITY OF WOMEN IN THE SIRIGU COMMUNITY

By Vincent Amenuveve, Accra, Ghana

The Sirigu Women Organisation for Pottery and Arts (SWOPA) in the Upper East Region of Ghana has played a crucial role in uncovering the potential and creativity of impoverished women in the Sirigu farming community.

Faced with declining yields from farming, it became not only important to revive the traditional arts of the women of Sirigu, but also to leverage them as an important source of income for the women and their families' upkeep.

Due to low yields resulting from climate change, many youths migrated from the community to southern Ghana in search of greener pastures, which were scarce.

In the past, women sold their wares individually and hardly benefited. They could not get good prices for their wares. This prompted a 90-year-old retired educationist, Madam Melanie Kasise, to work towards establishing the organisation.

Melanie wanted to give women group bargaining power in selling their wares locally, nationally and internationally.

SWOPA started on April 25th, 1997, with only 54 women. The organisation was established for the Sirigu women to revive the dying traditional artworks, to serve as an eco-tourism site and to enhance their income. The Association was registered with Ghana's Registrar General's Department on October 16th 1997.

Since its establishment, the Centre has received numerous regional, national and international awards in the tourism sector, thereby making the Sirigu community the hub of traditional architecture, pottery and wall design.

The organisation has also hosted many prominent people, including the late former United Nations (UN) Secretary-General, Mr Kofi Annan and his wife in 2004. The late Ghana's Vice President Aliu Mahama and Ambassadors from many countries were also hosted by the organisation.

To date, the organisation has trained more than 400 women. They are made up of 50 basket weavers, 100 pottery makers, 50 canvas painters, 25 mat weavers, 20 batik tie-dye makers, 25 wall designers and 80 petty traders, among others.

Indeed, the trained women in Sirigu have a peculiar style of painting that can be seen on the walls of their buildings. Their style of painting using red, black and white strokes has been passed through generations.

Their paintings also tell stories of their ancestors, beliefs and everyday activities. Notable among the wall paintings is the painting of a bird with a human head. Other wall paintings act as symbols for many things.

The drawing of a cow, for instance, on the wall is a symbol of wealth, while a bird symbolises hope for the future. A fish symbol shows a happy home, while a basket represents caring for one another. Bird and lizard symbols show friendship.

To keep arts and crafts alive, the organisation has been opening its arms to local women and tourists to visit the centre and be trained to make pots, weave baskets, paint walls or take home a piece of traditional, authentic local culture.

SWOPA, a women-centred Non-Governmental Organisation, also seeks to promote food security and the welfare of rural women in Sirigu and its environs.

In early 2002, it introduced canvas painting after tourists expressed admiration for the wall designs created on homes.



SWOPA founder Madam Melanie Kasise// Photo: Courtesy.

As a result of the numerous benefits enjoyed by members, many more women have joined the organisation, thereby increasing its membership. By virtue of the positive impact SWOPA has made on the Sirigu community over the years, the community became the highest tourist arrival site in the region in 2019, with 1,064 tourist arrivals recorded for the area in that year.

It, therefore, did not come as a surprise when the organisation was subsequently adjudged the 2019 best tourist site in the Upper East Region by the Ghana Tourism Authority.

On the international scene, in 2015, SWOPA was honoured with a communications award from the International Cooperation and Development Directorate-General of the European Commission in Brussels.

The success story of this organisation was adjudged the best in West and Central Africa and the fourth in the world after the Business Sector Advocacy Challenge (BUSAC) Fund, which presented the organisation's success story to the European Union (EU).

The BUSAC Fund also facilitated the extension of electricity to the SWOPA Centre, which has positively impacted the fortunes of the organisation by increasing production and sales of handicrafts and artworks by about 40%.

Since its establishment, the organisation has succeeded in promoting quality products that meet national and international market standards. Furthermore, it has created sales outlets in the national capital, Accra. The ability of its members to cost their own products through empowerment sessions in basic costing and record-keeping training is another significant achievement. There has been a reasonable rise in the income levels of some members, leading to an improved standard of living.

The leadership of SWOPA has also created a forum for sharing ideas and honing skills among its membership.

It is significant to note that all the achievements by SWOPA did not happen in a vacuum, but were credited to Madam Melanie Kasise.

Madam Kasise conceived the idea of establishing the organisation at a time when many young women left the Sirigu community to find jobs elsewhere.

Madam Kasise is the daughter of a Sirigu woman who used her skills in pottery to pay for her education. Madame Kasise has now become a true success story, having appeared at the UN to talk on women's issues. As the Founder of SWOPA, she continues to advocate for the rights and empowerment of women in the local community. In her own words, Madam Kasise stated that "We provide a unique opportunity for women to come together to share and find solutions to common challenges, strengthen social ties, enhance our bargaining powers, improve our skills in the production of quality canvas painting, basket ware, pottery and art, and in so doing improve our incomes."

Touching on the organisation's plans, the Founder stated that they hope to train many young people every year in canvas painting and basket weaving. Madam Kasise further explained that drilling a borehole to support the women in their art production, searching for more market avenues to boost sales and launching the organisation's cultural festival on the first Saturday of December every year are among other plans SWOPA hopes to implement.

Indeed, despite the achievements, challenges have persisted. The need for expansion and opening of more outlets has not been easy. Moreover, the poor road network within the Sirigu community has been a hindrance to moving cargo.

SWOPA's work aligns with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): SDG 1 – No Poverty; SDG 5 – Gender Equality; SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth; SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities, and SDG 4 – Quality Education (informal skills training).

The government of Ghana, development partners, public institutions and individual sponsors have been urged to support the organisation in improving the socioeconomic state of citizens.

CHANGEMAKERS: OLD WOMEN REDEFINING THE VILLAGE THROUGH BASKET WEAVING

BY ERICK OUNDAH, MIGORI - KENYA

The World Bank Group's economic overview as of 22/09/2025 highlighted that Kenya sustained steady economic growth over the last two decades, resulting in increased incomes, poverty reduction, and improved well-being among citizens. Further, the report indicated that the GDP remained resilient in 2025 despite global uncertainties, with growth expectations of 4.5%. With the labour market dwindling, employment growth declined from 4.4% in 2023 to 3.9% in 2024. Formal jobs stagnated at 15%.

To lessen the adverse ripple effects of unemployment in the village, a group of women in Migori County has founded a skill-based partnership to earn a living. From baskets to purses, cleaning detergents, knitting and necklace-making, Ober Women Group's economic footprint has penetrated the village. Deep in Kanyadgiro Village, Rongo Constituency, Migori County, we meet a vibrant community group affiliated with the Ober Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) Church. Before the official launch of this group in 2023, Evelyne Anyango Ouma, the chairperson, who hails from the neighbouring Kameji village, postulates that the present registered members could hardly afford a meal for their families. Now two years old and still active, "Ober Christian Women Group" has brought about countless success stories in the village.

"We realized that women were just loitering in the village with nothing impactful to do. It is then that one of us, who is into the weaving business in Nairobi, shared the opportunity with us", says Evelyne, who is flanked by a group of women engaged in different economic activities amidst our conversation.

It is not just basket weaving. Evelyne, with her team, was trained on several other economically impactful skill sets. Courtesy of the empowerment, the villagers are no longer wasting time on non-essential activities. These women redeem their leisure time on a newly found venture, a practice they say has limited their availability to potential village drama.

"All of us can make baskets, detergents, purses and necklaces. Each of us, however, decided to specialize in a specific art out of the choices we have so that we could train others competently", states Evelyne, who has specialized in basket weaving, an art she says



took her 3 days to learn.

With the current membership standing at 16, Ober Women Group works tirelessly and collectively to produce artistic baskets from pieces of wood, which are painted in the style of the client's choosing. Making a complete basket is a tedious and engaging process that requires a handsome reward, states Ober Women Group. The raw materials that make this stunning basket are ferried over 300 km away, from Kariokor, a market situated in Kenya's capital, Nairobi.

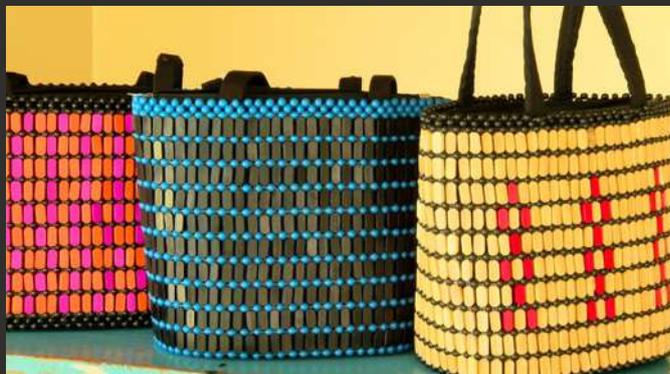


Old Women Redefining the Village Through Basket Weaving// Photo: Courtesy

“We order in bulk these ready-made handbags, these woods, beads and fishing line. The beads and woods come in different colours. And to achieve this beautiful look, we join 64 or 68 woods with a fishing line, depending on the basket size. Thereafter, we count 10 sets of the 64 or 68 joined woods with beads and use the same to cover our ready-made black bag.”, says Evelyne as she weaves a blue-white patterned basket. With the aid of a thread and a needle, the joined woods and beads are firmly bonded and cautiously stitched together.

Having mastered the skill, one should have beads, wood, fishing line, and a pair of scissors for cutting the fishing line. Weaving is a systematic process that requires time, as a single basket takes up to 4 days to complete.

Small, uniformly carved and uniquely painted woods with drilled-through holes are joined together with a fishing line to form an appealing colour pattern. In between the joined woods, bright-coloured beads are fixed to bring about the aesthetic appeal.



products.

To differentiate a small basket from a big basket, a tape measure is used, but for experts like Evelyne, just a rough look and a quick hand estimate gives a desirable size. A big basket is size 30 while a small basket is size 28, and from the size, a price is determined.

“A small basket consumes 64 woods times 10 lines up, and a big basket consumes 68 woods times 10 lines up. A good number of beads and fishing lines are also used”, says Evelyne, who assures potential clients of the durability of their

The products are not locally sourced. Evelyne and her group must pay the transportation cost from Nairobi to the village. They must also cater for the cost of buying the raw materials used to make these products.

“A packet of these ready-made woods is Kshs 480/=, a packet of beads, Kshs 480/=, we have to buy ready-made bags, a small one goes for Kshs 250/= and a big one sells at Kshs 300/=, there is also transport cost from Nairobi to Rongo and from Rongo town to the village”, says Evelyne, who clarifies that the product cost is largely determined by the cost of production and the overall time spent in coming up with a finished product. “A packet of these woods can produce two small baskets, with each small basket going for Kshs 1500/= while a big-sized one goes for Kshs 1700/=. Another packet of beads also produces two small baskets”, says Evelyne.

With its roots deep in the village, Ober Women Basket Weaving Group has carved out a name for itself in some of Kenya's notable towns. Thanks to its culture of accepting membership widely, who act as good ambassadors. Their success is attributed to the prioritization of customers' needs and resilience. From the look, their products are undoubtedly attractive, hence the steady growth.

“We sell these baskets in Rongo market every Wednesday, and to promote growth, we welcome new members to join us at the end of every year after consolidating our finances”, says Evelyne, who expounds that the new members usually bring in fresh ideas which impact the success of the group.

“Like right now we have an opening for five, but we cannot just recruit, one has to show that he is not so preoccupied to the level that will hinder their role in the group, because this is a teamwork” says Evelyne.

A group that commenced as a community self-help now embodies a changemaker's vision. Ober Women Group's beehive of activities demands instant availability when called upon, an aspect that is keenly vetted for the new entrants. To uplift the socioeconomic status of the village, Ober Women group have set up two strategic training centres at St. Dalmas and at Winyo. They run the training free of charge.

“We often move around the village training people these skills, and we would want to have a reliable member who, when asked to spearhead these programmes, will willingly do it, not someone who is ever committed”, says Evelyne

To keep the group running, a portion of any profit made from sales is channeled to the joint account, and individual creators pocket a percentage for personal use. The Ober Women meet every Thursday to review and strengthen their growth.

“This money helps us in buying basic household items like cooking oil, soap, even books and pens for school-going children”, asserts Evelyne as she marvels at the financial strides they have made as a group, particularly on table banking. “I used to hear the word table banking with other people, the fact that we are doing it ourselves today is an achievement, and I want to urge others to follow suit”, says Evelyne

It is an activity that, to them, has not rendered farming, the nation's economic backbone, less important, as they strictly weave baskets during their free time.

“As we are speaking, we have a running project where we have a large-scale sweet potato farm and dairy farming, and this has been made possible with the little contribution we make in the group”, says Evelyne, who reiterates that they have done countless projects, from basket weaving.

On challenges faced, Evelyne recounts instances where certain members have in the past attempted to conceal profits from sales, thereby denying the group its share, something she fears could crumble their growth. And with the demanding economy, they sometimes struggle to get customers, or some customers pick baskets with the promise of paying only to become a nuisance and evasive. “The challenges are, however, unforeseen and should discourage anyone”, declares Evelyne.



Ober Women Group after a meeting// Photo: Erick Oumdah

With the widespread unemployment surge, Evelyne has encouraged all the youths and women, both employed and unemployed, to attend their weekly meeting on Thursdays at Ober SDA and be trained and empowered economically. This, she says, will ease pressure on family breadwinners by providing a source of income.

The Ober women Group is indisputably on a mission to defy the stereotype of old women not being able to fend for themselves, a challenge to the lazy youths. Echoing the words of the bible as a Christian community, they have reprimanded the youths that an idle mind is the devil's workshop.

With local CBC learners becoming beneficiaries of their undeniable weaving skills, Ober Women Group has undoubtedly positioned itself as a changemaker, beating all odds to reclaim the societal glory. Challenging youths to create instead of seeking employment, many have welcomed this economic empowerment initiative that is redefining Kanyadgiro village.

IRRIGATION SCHEME INITIATIVE EMPOWERS WOMEN IN ZIMBABWE'S RURAL COMMUNITIES

By Tafadzwa Mwanengureni, Harare - Zimbabwe

For most of her life, Beauty Fambi never imagined she would become a full-time farmer. She grew seasonal crops such as maize and soybeans while her husband supported the family through welding work. Farming was primarily for household consumption, not for income.

That changed in 2017 when Fambi, a mother of four, joined a garden irrigation scheme introduced by Women and Land in Zimbabwe (WLZ) in her community in the Makonde district, just outside Chinhoyi. This initiative marked a turning point that transformed her livelihood and financial stability.

WLZ is a membership-based organization that empowers rural women, particularly regarding land rights and climate change adaptation.

"Before I joined this initiative, my typical yield was one tonne of beans and soya beans each. Since 2017, I now get at least six to eight tonnes per harvest," Fambi told *The Africa Feature Network (AFN)*.



A member of the garden Irrigation Scheme initiative showcasing her onions from the garden// Photo: Tafadzwa Mwanengureni



One of the WLZ members irrigation gardens// Photo: Tafadzwa Mwanengureni

Launched in 2017, WLZ's Irrigation Schemes Programme has revived dysfunctional irrigation systems and established new ones across 23 districts in eight provinces in Zimbabwe. The program has created more than twenty-five-hectare garden irrigation schemes, each directly benefiting about 50 women. Women make up an estimated 70% of Zimbabwe's agricultural workforce, placing them at the centre of food production. Despite this, many remain highly vulnerable to climate change. Most communal farmers, the majority of whom are women, lack access to climate-resilient farming information, training, and financing, leaving them exposed to increasingly erratic weather patterns. Heavy reliance on rain-fed agriculture has further threatened rural livelihoods.

Speaking to *The Africa Feature Network*, Olga Nhari, Founder and National Coordinator of the Women in Agriculture Union (WAU), said that Zimbabwean agriculture faces several intersecting challenges in the context of climate change. These included limited access to climate-smart financing, land tenure insecurity, gender-based barriers, and the impact of extreme weather events.

Through WLZ training and workshops, Fambi and thousands of women across Zimbabwe have gained access to irrigation infrastructure, farming tools, and knowledge, enabling them to transition from subsistence farming to cash crop production. This shift has significantly improved food security and household incomes.

"They have acquired skills in good farming practices and agroecological methods, producing food without chemicals. Many have successfully uplifted their lives," said Gloria Makahwi, WLZ Gender and Advocacy Officer. "We have also trained them in market linkages and financial literacy, connecting them with financial institutions such as Econet, which provides loans and life insurance policies." She added.

Despite the progress, climate challenges persist, as years of erratic rainfall led to water shortages at the irrigation scheme Fambi belonged to, forcing members to ration water. Many women dropped out during the dry season, returning only when the rains resumed. Determined to continue farming year-round, Fambi took matters into her own hands.

She drilled a borehole at her homestead and began replicating the WLZ irrigation model independently.

"Our garden engine was overwhelmed by demand from all members, so I couldn't reach my desired yields," she said. "I drilled a borehole at home and started applying everything I learned through the scheme."

Today, Fambi grows cash crops including cabbage, beans, tomatoes, and green peppers throughout the year. She earns approximately US\$250 per week from sales.

When the 2023–2024 El Niño-induced drought hit Southern Africa, Fambi's household was spared from hunger. Her irrigation skills and diversified crops provided a reliable income stream.

"I learned how to make natural fertilizers using cow dung and urine, and how to use *Cucumis ficifolius* as a pesticide," she said. "WLZ also taught us market research, record-keeping, and the importance of joining savings clubs."

Makahwi explained that WLZ's work is anchored on three pillars: solidarity, urgency, and empowerment. Through collective action, women amplify their voices, challenge patriarchal barriers, and advocate for their rights.

Fambi says women in her community now work closely with agricultural extension officers through study circles, where they discuss farming techniques as well as broader social issues affecting their lives.

Speaking to journalists ahead of the International Day of Cooperatives commemorations in August, Zimbabwe's Minister of Women's Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development, Senator Monica Mutsvangwa, highlighted the role of cooperatives in advancing inclusive development. "Cooperatives operate at the heart of communities, benefiting marginalized groups, fostering inclusivity, and strengthening social cohesion," she said.

"They uphold the principles of equality, solidarity, and self-help, and are instrumental in advancing gender equality, women's leadership, and economic empowerment," she added.

Nhari welcomed the continued focus on women farmers, noting that empowering them is critical for national resilience.

"Empowering women in agriculture is not just about gender equity," she said. "It is central to food security and climate resilience."



Rural women making organic fertilizers including crowding, chicken soup and bokadhi fertilizers// Photo: Tafadzwa Mwanengureni

HOW WAMAMA TWAVEZA IS TURNING KAKUMA REFUGEE CAMP INTO A VEGETABLE HUB

By [Sefu Sabila](#), Turkana, Kenya

Millions of people across Africa are forced to leave their homes every year, displaced by conflict, persecution or the effects of climate change. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than twenty-three million Africans were displaced in 2024, including refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless individuals.

For these communities, refugee camps provide essential shelter and humanitarian assistance, yet life within them is often marred by harsh conditions, with limited access to food, water and opportunities to rebuild livelihoods. These camps, though temporary, have become spaces where resilience is forged and innovation begins.

Kakuma Refugee Camp in Turkana County, Kenya, the largest in Africa, is home to over 800,000 people from South Sudan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and other countries, according to data by UNHCR. The camp is situated in an arid landscape where drought, hunger and scarce resources shape daily life. Flash floods in 2024 damaged shelters and infrastructure, making survival even more precarious for both refugees and the host Turkana community. For many who reside in Kakuma, dependence on humanitarian aid has been the only means of survival. Into the bargain, the supply of food is never enough to meet the needs of all families.

Amid this challenging environment, Andrea Malilo, a Congolese refugee who has spent sixteen years in Kakuma, founded Hope for Refugee Life (HRL) in 2022.

“It has been a journey that began in June 2022. The idea of Hope for Refugee Life was born through personal experiences from Congo and here in the camp. Waiting for WFP to supply food, which has never been enough for families in the camp. I knew something had to be done. Sustainable and smart agriculture was the way to go, as I understood farming, as we always practiced back at home, before disaster struck,” Malilo explained.



A Woman from Wamama Twaweza harvesting their vegetables after a successful planting season! Photo: Sefu Sabila

Driven by personal experience and a desire to empower women, he began training refugees in sustainable agriculture to increase food access and create income opportunities. What started with two women working on a small, dry plot of land has grown into Wamama Twaweza, a Swahili word which translates to ‘As Women We Are Able’.

Malilo recalls the early days when convincing women to believe that

vegetables could grow in arid soil seemed impossible, yet their determination turned that vision into reality.

Because refugees are not allowed to own land, HRL introduced creative approaches such as growing vegetables in containers, old tyres, raised beds and wooden boxes. The women learned to select crops suited to the local environment and to use a shared solar-powered pump to water their plants efficiently.

They grow amaranth, jute mallow, sukuma wiki, spinach, moringa, cassava and sweet potatoes, which are used for home consumption and sold in camp markets, providing both nutrition and income. When yields of sukuma wiki began to decline, they switched to other crops, resulting in a bumper harvest of *mrenda* and *mchicha*.

Ensuring continued productivity, Malilo and the team further provide farmers with seeds, tools, distribution of compost manure and seedlings. With only one solar pump, each woman is given the pump for two days to water their farm, so that their crops do not dry up.

Additionally, due to limited resources, the team introduced a loaning scheme, Village Service Loan (VSL), which includes farmers from Wamama Twaweza, who save a portion of their profits and later take up loans to

boost their production or venture into other businesses. Malilo says this was to cushion them during extreme conditions and train them on financial management and discipline.

“We came with VSL, as a majority of women did not plan well with their profits. In VSL, women contribute 20% of their profits, which they can access after six months. We encourage them to do other income-generating activities to support them as a backup plan when the conditions become unbearable,” Malilo explained.

Machozi Kasongo, a Congolese and a beneficiary of VSL, says her savings from the scheme enabled her to open up her fried cassava business at Kakuma One, a unique venture warmly embraced by other refugees aside from their normal cultural foods.

“My current business is a product of VSL. It has supported me so much. My savings from vegetable sales have enabled me to order cassava as far as Kitale, and sometimes within Kakuma. As Wamama Twaweza, we want this programme to be long-term. Many of us can now fully provide for our families without donations,” Kasongo said.

Her colleague Vumilia Isia, also a Congolese, said not only VSL, but her farming has enabled her to fully provide for her family, and access better healthcare services within Kakuma.

“This was lifesaving. I’m proud of Hope for Refugee Life taking me through farming. From the little sales of my vegetables, I can buy other foods to complete the vegetables. Most importantly, as refugees, it is difficult to access quality medical services. We are often offered painkillers without diagnosis, but with my money, I can now access medical services at the hospital of my choice, and receive better services,” Isia said.

Other than Machozi and Isia, the initiative has transformed many lives in the camp. Achol Kiir, a South Sudanese farmer and vendor in Hong Kong Market within the camp, can now supply vegetables to her family, the camp and hopes to reach Kakuma Town and Kalobeyei Settlement.

Nyamol Nyapiir, a deaf South Sudanese woman, has also gained independence and dignity through farming, among many others.

Though making some strides in the camp, Malilo attributes the lack of funds to their success as organisations. “Access to financial services is one, running an organisation voluntarily is not easy, we have limited funds as some of our members are not working, making it difficult to make the monthly contribution. We do train monthly, the number keeps growing, we end up lacking structures to hold these women,” he explained.

Despite this, over two hundred women have been empowered through Wamama Twaweza, and the initiative continues to grow. HRL also encourages the planting of fruit trees to meet the high demand for fresh produce within the camp and works alongside organisations such as Farming Health Education, which has constructed over eight hundred kitchen gardens. Hope for Refugee Life demonstrates that refugee-led initiatives can create lasting impact. Malilo and his team urge governments, NGOs and donors to support such organisations, recognising that refugees are not simply recipients of aid but innovators, leaders and change-makers. Through perseverance, ingenuity and community solidarity, Kakuma is slowly transforming from a camp defined by dependence into a hub of opportunity and hope, where refugees are able not only to survive but to shape their own futures. Efforts by HRL as well as Farming and Health Education (FHE) are closely aligned with the government's programme of ensuring food security and zero hunger for all Kenyans by the year 2030, engraved on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 2), which aims to end hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.

SHE OVERCAME TEENAGE MOTHERHOOD AND NOW UPLIFTS VULNERABLE FAMILIES IN KENYA FROM THE UK

By Jacinta Atieno, Kisumu - Kenya

Elizabeth Anyango Odaga's story begins in Nyalenda, the largest informal settlement in Kisumu.

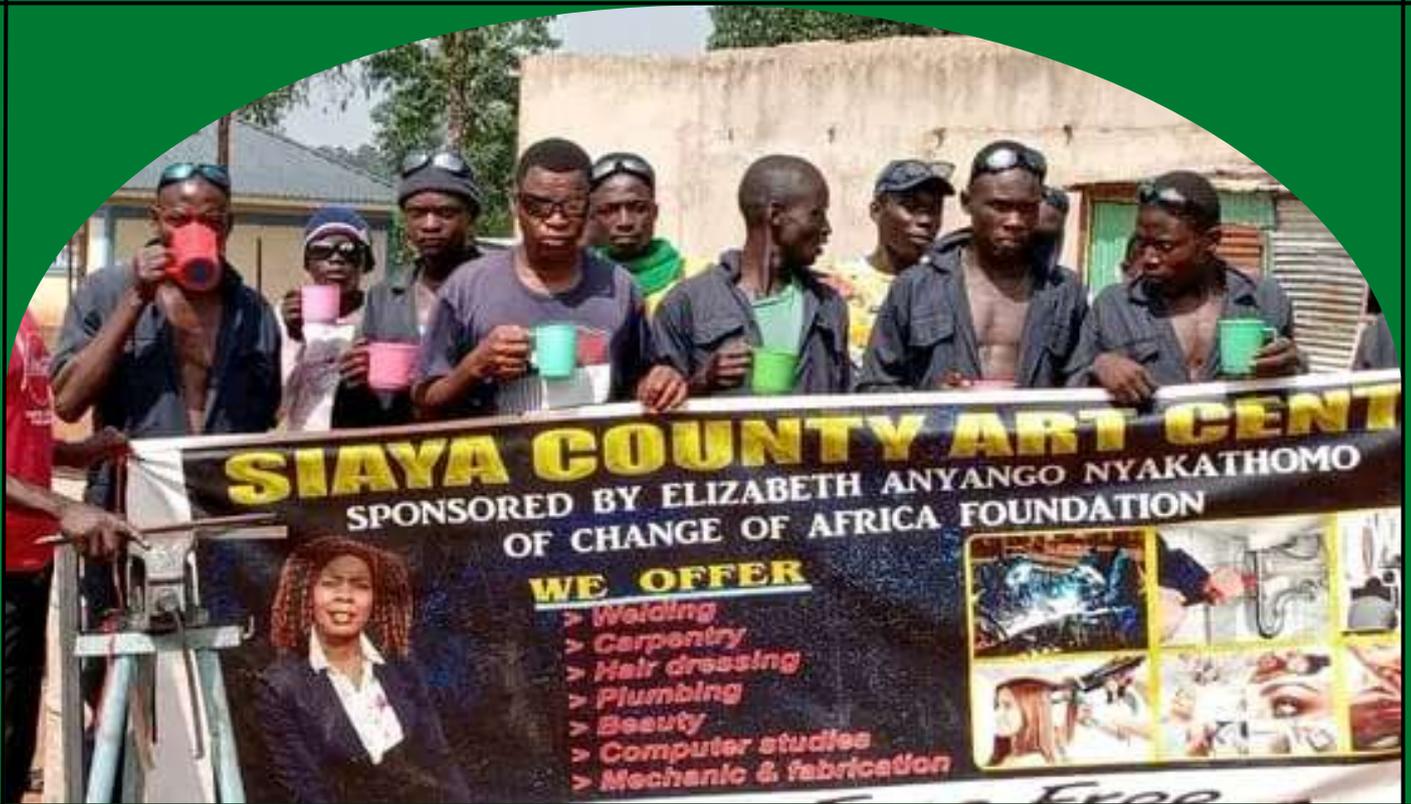
The narrow alleys hummed with the chatter of children and the calls of hawkers, dust rising in the midday heat as families struggle to survive; typical daily events of the neighbourhood. Growing up in a large family with limited resources, Elizabeth helped her mother earn a living by selling paraffin, simsim, mangoes and sweets by the roadside. Every coin mattered, and every day taught her a lesson in resilience. These early experiences shaped her understanding of hardship and quietly built the courage she would rely on throughout her life. As a teenager, Elizabeth's home life grew tense. Her father, frustrated by the absence of sons in the family, took a second wife. Elizabeth watched her mother endure humiliation and conflict, learning the harsh truth of domestic inequality. Those years left a mark on her young mind, planting the first seeds of a lifelong commitment to women's rights and dignity. She understood that strength often arises in silence and that courage is sometimes the quiet choice to keep moving forward despite fear. At 17, her life took a dramatic turn when she became pregnant. Disowned by her father, she had nowhere to turn. With her newborn daughter, Bonita, she sought refuge with her grandmother in Siaya. Teenage motherhood, Elizabeth says, came with it sown burdens,

exhaustion, judgment, and the relentless pressure to provide, but she refused to let her dreams die. Reflecting on those early struggles. "Becoming a mother at seventeen was the hardest moment of my life. I felt abandoned, disowned by my father and terrified about the future. But I knew I could not give up on myself or my daughter. Every challenge became a lesson in resilience, and I promised myself I would create opportunities for others facing similar struggles." Elizabeth said. Determined to build a life for her child, Elizabeth moved to Mombasa, where she trained as a hairdresser. The business offered independence and a path forward, but life had more lessons in store. It was in Mombasa that she met the man who would become her husband. Their connection grew slowly, forged through small acts of kindness, shared laughter and mutual understanding. When the opportunity arose to relocate to the United Kingdom, excitement was tempered with fear. Leaving her daughter, her grandmother, and the familiar in Kenya, she stepped into a world of unfamiliar accents, foreign rules, and quiet isolation. Nights were long and often lonely, yet beneath the fear, Elizabeth carried the determination that had guided her through childhood struggles and teenage motherhood. Education became both refuge and purpose. In classrooms filled with foreign ideas and unfamiliar voices, she threw herself into learning. Counselling psychology allowed her to understand suffering in ways she had experienced personally, while law, politics, and sociology at Cambridge University gave her tools

to challenge systems of inequality. Each lecture reminded her of the children, women, and elderly people she had left behind. Elizabeth's resolve eventually gave birth to the Change Africa Foundation. From the UK, she began mobilising resources to support vulnerable families in Siaya County. Through the organisation, she has been helping widows pay school fees to the vulnerable and building modest houses for the elderly and orphans. The organisation was registered according to the laws of the land and became fully operational. She explains the philosophy behind her work.



Elizabeth Anyango at a past event// Photo: Courtesy



CAF began with small acts, paying school fees for one child, helping one widow rebuild her home. But I knew that real change requires vision and persistence. Today, seeing young people learn skills, women regain dignity, and families rebuild their lives reminds me why every small effort matters.



The foundation now supports hundreds of students, paying school fees, supplying uniforms, and providing mentorship. Art and skill centres established by CAF train in: welding, tailoring, beauty therapy, computer studies, motor mechanics, hairdressing, and plumbing. Young people are trained and given resources to help them earn a living. Elizabeth's commitment goes beyond education and vocational training. Environmental conservation is central to her vision. Working with over thirty schools across Siaya County, CAF has planted thousands of indigenous trees, initiated kitchen gardens projects and integrated environmental education into classrooms. Children lead eco-clubs, organise community clean-ups, and inspire their families to adopt sustainable practices. For Elizabeth, these efforts are about more than greenery; they are about teaching young people the connection between the environment, food security, and the health of their communities. Gender-based violence is another focus. Through survivor-centred programmes, CAF supports women and girls with emergency medical care, counselling, and legal aid. Boys' clubs, awareness campaigns, and community dialogues challenge harmful attitudes and create safer spaces. Survivors are encouraged to become peer mentors, using their experiences to guide others and reduce stigma. In communities where silence once reigned, CAF has nurtured bold conversations and accountability, giving voice to those previously ignored.

Recognition of Elizabeth's work came on 22 November 2025, when she was honoured by the Jamhuri Kenya Awards with the Youth Empowerment and Community Impact Award in the leadership category. Her personal assistant and community outreach team received the award on her behalf, a testament to the far-reaching influence of her work from thousands of kilometres away. Reflecting on the recognition, Elizabeth said:

"This award is not mine alone. It belongs to the children, the women, the volunteers, and every person who has allowed us to serve them. It is a reminder that when we act with empathy and determination, we can transform lives, even from thousands of kilometres away."

Communities in Siaya County speak of her with genuine emotion. Pauline Atieno, a widow from Rarieda sub-county, recalls how Elizabeth's courtesy helped her daughter to complete her studies when she was on the verge of dropping out due to a lack of school fees.

"Before Mama Elizabeth started helping us, my daughter was about to leave school because I could not pay the fees. She stepped in and helped us settle the arrears." Said Pauline

Elizabeth Anyango Odaga's journey, from teenage motherhood in Nyalenda to becoming a recognised community leader operating from the UK, is a story of resilience, empathy, and determination. Her leadership is grounded in lived experience and the desire to transform her community. Through the Change Africa Foundation, she is restoring dignity, empowering the vulnerable and transforming communities.

HOW STAR-GHANA FOUNDATION IS COMBATING EXTREMISM AMONG YOUTHS, WOMEN

By Frederick Yenbaar Nuuri-Teg, Lawra, Ghana

The Sahel region has become the epicentre of global terrorism because of rising insecurity and violent extremism driven by religious, social and economic factors. In Burkina Faso, the deteriorating security situation displaced more than fifteen thousand people, many of whom sought refuge in communities across northern Ghana. This reality created an urgent need to strengthen the capacity of vulnerable and at-risk populations in three border communities to prevent and counter radicalisation and violent extremism.

In 2024, STAR-Ghana Foundation, with funding from the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) Emergency Programme, implemented the Building Resilience Against Violent Extremism (BRAVE) Project in three communities: Sapeliga in the Bawku West District and Garu in the Garu District all in the Upper East Region. The third community is Fielmou in the Sissala West District of the Upper West Region.

The BRAVE Project aimed to expand access to livelihood opportunities and entrepreneurship skills for vulnerable host and refugee women. It also sought to increase awareness among at-risk youth aged fifteen to thirty five on the drivers of radicalisation within both host and refugee communities.

One of the major achievements of the project was the economic empowerment of two hundred and two women. They improved their economic abilities and gained access to income-generating activities through livelihood skills training, business start-up assistance and support in accessing markets. The project also contributed significantly to youth resilience to online radicalisation. Four hundred and sixty five young people, both host and refugee, reduced their vulnerability through training in digital literacy, critical thinking, the formation of digital literacy clubs and community sensitisation efforts.

The project strengthened social cohesion across the three target communities, building trust and stronger relationships between host members and those who had fled from neighbouring countries.

The women received livelihood training in five trade areas: rice parboiling, weaving,

breadmaking, soapmaking and shea processing. This took place over eight months, from April to November 2024. A Village Savings and Loan Association model was introduced in all three communities, supported by a revolving fund scheme to help women set up and sustain their enterprises beyond the project's timeline.

The four hundred and sixty five youth participants were engaged through community-based clubs and trained to recognise and manage information disorder, including misinformation, disinformation and malinformation. They also learned critical thinking, fact-checking, cyberbullying prevention, digital etiquette and responsible online behaviour. These young people later led community sensitisation work on preventing radicalisation and violent extremism. Ahead of Ghana's 2024 General Election, they creatively used new media to launch a social media campaign encouraging peaceful elections.

The success of this phase led to the expansion of the project into seven additional communities including Gwollu, Kasaapuori, Kupulima and Katini in the Upper West Region, as well as Bansi, Mandago and Nwaare in the Upper East Region.

The Project has contributed to building a sustainable model for peace and security by strengthening community resilience, economically and socially empowering vulnerable women and equipping youth with the digital literacy skills needed to resist radicalisation and recruitment into violent extremism.

Community-based programmes that combine livelihood opportunities, awareness activities and dialogue effectively reduce drivers of extremism and strengthen local peacebuilding efforts. Christina Kyebulang from Fielmou notes that extremists often target unemployed people, and the project reduced this vulnerability in her community.

Ajara Osman, one of the livelihood beneficiaries, says that learning breadmaking has enabled her to meet her basic needs, support her children's education and feed her family. She has

also begun training other women.

Another beneficiary, Anas Nasratufrom, explains that the lack of viable economic activity had caused significant psychological stress, but the intervention provided skills in soapmaking, baking and oil extraction, which eased that burden.

"There has been a surge in cases of psychological stress as a result of lack of viable economic activity. I'm glad that the intervention is now bridging this gap through skills." Anas noted.



Photo session at STAR-Ghana Foundation. The foundation is combating Extremism among youths, women

Enhancing digital literacy and critical thinking among at-risk youth significantly reduces their susceptibility to extremist narratives. Gafaru Alhassan from Garu shared that he no longer forwards information without verifying it from credible sources. Felix from the Fielmou Digital Skills Club described how he debunked a WhatsApp video by analysing the vegetation and realising it was not filmed in Ghana.

Community-level factors such as trust, cohesion and shared values contributed to improved resilience. One woman recalled the fear and anxiety they experienced when refugees from Burkina Faso first arrived. Concerns about safety and the possibility of extremists entering the community created tension. Through the project's dialogue meetings, this fear faded, host and refugee families now consider themselves one community. A refugee beneficiary added that being included in the project helped build mutual trust and made both groups feel comfortable living and working together. She expressed gratitude to STAR-Ghana Foundation for this transformation.

LEVERAGING ART IN HOLISTIC CHILD DEVELOPMENT IN NAIROBI'S INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

By [Dahira Ahmed](#), Mathare - Kenya



Motivated Mindset Dancers Mathare!!! Photo- Dahira Ahmed

Sports and Culture

When the world shut down in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and many families watched their lives fall apart, Brian Otieno Owino was among those who felt the weight of the crisis. The pandemic cost him his job as a team-building facilitator for tour companies in Nairobi, leaving him with nothing to fall back on. The city that once roared with life had become still. In that silence, however, something inside him refused to die. Dance had always been the thing that carried Brian, so he followed that instinct.

One day, while scrolling through TikTok, he saw the “Jerusalema dance” challenge going viral. He took the challenge, and his video clip went viral. His dance moves caught the attention of many who wanted to learn from him. That moment became the seed of Motivated Mindset Dancers.

“I had nothing to lose,” Brian says, adding that he recorded the video and posted it on his LinkedIn account. “I didn’t even think anyone would watch,” he recalls

The video blew up. Children in the neighbourhood began stopping him on the street to ask him to teach them the moves. What started as a moment of boredom quickly transformed into a spark of purpose. “I saw excitement in their eyes,” he says. “And I thought... maybe this can be something bigger”, he added. What began as a few children dancing on bare ground in a cramped space has now grown into a community-based organisation with a mission to educate, empower, entertain, expose children to opportunities and shape their values through art.

Brian insists that discipline is the backbone of everything. Before a child joins, he meets with the parents, explains the expectations and makes sure the child is genuinely interested in learning. Over time, volunteers joined, choreographers came in, sponsors chipped in, and a movement began to form around one belief: that children in the slums deserve a chance to dream.

One of their earliest victories was renting a tiny room for four thousand shillings a month. The walls were rusty iron sheets, the floor was dusty, yet they called it their studio because it represented safety. Insecurity soon caught up with them and their speakers and other equipment were stolen, something Brian says is almost normal where they live. Even so, they bought new ones and kept going. As their online presence grew, they began attracting attention from outside Kenya. They were honoured in the United-

Kingdom in the Art and Culture category for an international online dance competition, making them the first African crew to receive that kind of recognition. The spotlight brought in partnerships with the Haiti Foundation, which supported them financially through proceeds from cryptocurrency awareness campaigns, while the Hip Hop Congress National in New York occasionally helped with costumes and part of the rent.

Despite the growth, Brian acknowledges that finances remain their greatest challenge, particularly following the reduction of United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funding, which had previously supported local community programmes.

Motivated Mindset Dancers still run several impactful activities, which include exposing children living inside and outside the slums to art through slum motivation tours, exchange programmes with international schools and street-feeding activities that provide food to street children and vulnerable families. Every weekend after practice, the children share a cooked meal donated by a nearby Indian hotel, something Brian considers an important form of encouragement.



Motivated Mindset Dancers at the Tukuza Awards// Photo- Courtesy

The challenges they face are beyond finances. Many people still believe dance and graffiti promote indiscipline. Some parents blame the group whenever their children misbehave at home, unaware that Brian's work is actually keeping the children away from drugs. He says the children are eager to learn, but without proper costumes, good cameras, stable rent, and enough food, the work becomes difficult.

Still, there is visible progress. Compared to 2020, when the group was first formed, Brian speaks with a sense of fulfilment. They have won several awards, including FEMA, Extreme, Timiza, Tukuza and the African Children of the Year Award in South Africa. Their content creation has gained significant online attention as they focus on messages that go beyond dance. The presence of the dance group has reduced drug abuse among the local youth. Children who once spent their days roaming the streets now spend their weekends practicing, learning new skills and winning competitions. Brian believes that in the next ten years, cases of drug abuse among children in the area will drastically drop because he has already seen the change happening.

Among the dancers is eleven-year-old Andie Miles. He says he joined the group because he did not want to stay idle at home. His younger brother, who is only four years old, is also part of the group and entertains everyone with his jokes and dance moves. Another member, Valeria Rose, joined in 2020 and has grown into one of the most confident performers. She balances school and dance carefully, often attending tuition before practice. She already earns from performances and has won multiple awards. Her only challenge is outgrowing her costumes and the shortage of cameras, which slows down their content creation.

Eighteen-year-old David Kanali says joining Motivated Mindset Dancers changed the direction of his life. Before he joined, he believed he would live in the slums forever. Now he has visited places he never thought he would see and met people he only admired on screens. He has become a videographer and camera operator, skills he learned inside the team, not in school.

The group also gives back to the community through street feeding programmes, which help reduce drug abuse and depression among vulnerable children. They organise monthly cleanup exercises and use them to teach children the importance of social responsibility. Brian holds mentorship sessions with both children and parents, encouraging families to support their children's talents and treat co-curricular abilities as valuable. They collaborate with churches and gospel artists, creating TikTok dances for various songs, which has further increased their visibility. Beyond dance, members have learned extra skills including salon work, videography and photography, which gives them alternative paths of growth.



Motivated Mindset Dancers doing community service// Photo- Courtesy

Brian says he only receives security support from the government despite the Social Protection, Culture and Recreation Sector being a crucial component of Kenya's development agenda. His biggest dream is to build a fully equipped dance academy in Mathare, a place where art and education exist in one space. He imagines a school where children do not have to choose between talent and academics.

Where Eagles Dare: Zimbabwe's Martial Arts Maestro Inspiring a Generation

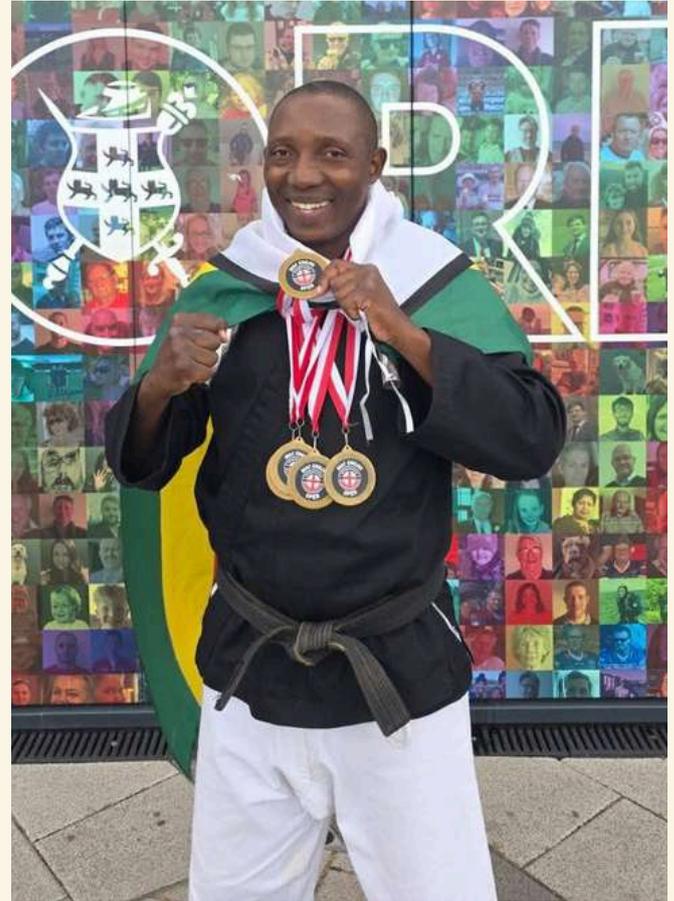


Martial arts, though a multi-billion-dollar global sport, remains relatively niche in Africa

By Colleen Maenda, Harare - Zimbabwe



Wilfred Manenji Mashaya 'Zim Ninja during a training session' Photo: Courtesy



Zim Ninja displaying his medals! Photo: courtesy

Sports is a global industry generating billions of dollars annually, with the worldwide sports market estimated at \$600 billion. Revenue streams largely come from broadcasting rights, sponsorship, merchandise and ticket sales. In Africa, the sporting market is worth around \$12 billion. In Zimbabwe, the sports industry is mixed; some areas show promise, while others face significant challenges. Football is the most popular sport, followed by cricket and rugby. Martial arts, though a multi-billion-dollar global sport, remains relatively niche in Africa. Its limited visibility on the continent is partly due to economic instability, inadequate infrastructure, and a small market size, factors which deter sponsors and reduce international exposure. In Zimbabwe, one man has taken it upon himself to showcase martial arts locally, regionally and internationally, often self-funding his

efforts. Wilfred Manenji Mashaya, widely known as 'Zim Ninja', is a renowned martial artist, trainer and administrator with over three decades of dedicated service. His journey began thirty-seven years ago in rural Masvingo, Zimbabwe, while herding cattle. Inspired by the legendary Bruce Lee, he fell in love with martial arts and committed himself to the sport. Mashaya's dedication, commitment to community, and impeccable record of achievements have made him a prominent figure in Zimbabwean sports. Despite limited sponsorship and corporate support, he has represented Zimbabwe internationally in countries such as Russia, Spain, England, Montenegro, Wales, Bangladesh, Italy, Poland, Ghana, South Africa and Namibia. His record of achievements is extensive. Mashaya became the first African Kobudo World Champion, trained

children and women under the mantra "catch them young", and attained multiple international certifications and black belt ranks across various martial arts disciplines. Today, he holds a 6th Dan Black Belt in Kobudo, a 5th Dan in Self Defense, and black belts in Bujinkan Ninjutsu and Kyokushin Karate, earning him the title 'Shihan'.

He introduced four international martial arts styles to Zimbabwe: Bujinkan Ninjutsu, Nunchaku-do, Self Defense, and Kobudo. This has opened opportunities for Zimbabweans to learn and compete at regional and international levels. Remarkably, Mashaya has trained and produced World Champions while still actively competing. One of his protégés, Sensei Vincent Fambira, holds a 3rd Dan belt and became a World Champion in the United Kingdom in 2023.



Mashaya's trainees, including men, women and children, have collectively won over 150 medals in virtual competitions since 2020, promoting equal sporting opportunities and contributing to a disciplined, healthy society. His academy instills life skills such as discipline, fitness, self-esteem, social interaction, and self-defence, while steering youth away from crime and substance abuse.

Beyond training athletes, Mashaya works with police officers and security personnel, teaching armed and unarmed self-defence techniques that enhance community safety and professional security practices. His contributions have been recognised internationally, earning him awards and appointments including Martial Arts Ambassador by the Mediterranean Karate Alliance in Malta, the King of Self-Defense Belt from Poland, World Champion titles in Kobudo and Karate, and induction into multiple international halls of fame across Europe and India.

Mashaya is the founder of the Zimbabwe Ninja Academy, registered with the Zimbabwe Karate Union and affiliated with the Sports and Recreation Commission. Under his leadership, the academy has produced national team players and trained over 400 participants of various ages. In October 2025, eight children he trained competed at the World Championships in Wales, winning forty-three medals for Zimbabwe. Parents celebrated their children's achievements, recognising Mashaya's mentorship and guidance.

He also provides self-defence training to women with disabilities and albinism in partnership with government bodies, pioneering inclusive opportunities in sport and breaking down barriers for vulnerable populations. For this work, he became the first Zimbabwean and African to offer voluntary self-defence lessons for women with disabilities, earning international recognition and awards.

Despite financial and structural challenges, Mashaya has persevered, self-funding participation in competitions and promoting martial arts in Zimbabwe. He has become a mentor, cultural ambassador and role model, inspiring a new generation of martial artists. His dedication has placed Zimbabwe firmly on the global martial arts map and continues to empower youth, women and communities across the country.

Shihan Wilfred Mashaya is more than a martial artist. He is a legend, a visionary and a driving force shaping the future of sport, discipline and opportunity in Zimbabwe and beyond.

How Loren Stoddard's Veridicor LTO is Redefining Global Mining Legitimacy

BY PETER AOWA

Conflict-related disruption could cost a large-scale mining project with capital expenditure between three billion and five billion US dollars according to a research conducted by the Harvard Kennedy School and the University of Queensland. The study, which involved interviews and case analysis to quantify how community conflict translates into financial cost for extractive companies, established that cumulatively, about twenty million US dollars could be lost per week in delayed production.

According to a World Development paper published in October 2022, one quarter of mining operations in Africa experience social conflict. At least twenty-five per cent of mining operations in Africa, based on analysis from mining companies included in the study, had nearby social conflicts including blockades, protests, or strikes.

These figures highlight a critical reality for the mining sector. Legal permits and financial resources are no longer sufficient to guarantee smooth operations. Communities, traditional authorities, regulators, and political actors exert influence that can accelerate, delay, or completely halt projects. For companies that underestimate this influence, the cost is immediate and often irreversible.

It is against this backdrop that Veridicor's Licence To Operate approach has established its prominence. The firm focuses on measuring, assessing, and strengthening the relationships between companies and the various stakeholders that shape the operational environment. Veridicor provides actionable insight into risks that could compromise project continuity by positioning stakeholder approval as a central business concern rather than a peripheral social obligation.

At the helm of the company is former Director of General Development at the USAID Loren Stoddard who serves as Founder the Chief Executive Officer. Loren's career spans decades at the intersection of diplomacy, trade, and emerging markets characterized by high political and social risk. He has championed the idea that the most pressing challenges for mining companies are relational rather than technical or financial.

In an exclusive interview with The Africa Feature Network, Loren said that while companies often assume that securing regulatory compliance and deploying capital will automatically translate into operational continuity, the reality is that it is just one of the foundational approaches to getting legitimacy. "A lot needs to be done from there", he said. He maintains that the communities who live near, govern, and regulate mining operations hold equal or greater influence over a project's success. Under his leadership, Veridicor has positioned itself as a bridge between corporate strategy and social



Mr. Loren Stoddard – The Founder and CEO of Veridicor LTO //Photo courtesy

legitimacy, helping companies navigate complex and dynamic stakeholder landscapes.

The company's methodology emphasizes field engagement, rigorous stakeholder mapping, and continuous monitoring of trust. Unlike traditional risk assessments that focus narrowly on what could go wrong, Veridicor evaluates whether the strength of relationships and trust is sufficient to withstand pressure. It then translates these assessments into strategic guidance, advising executives and boards on the actions required to maintain legitimacy throughout a project's lifecycle.

In Africa, where mining operations are frequently intertwined with land rights, community livelihoods, and national development priorities, these interventions have proven particularly vital. The firm's research consistently shows that stakeholder support is neither automatic nor permanent. It must be actively nurtured through consistent engagement and responsive decision-making.

While mining remains the company's most visible sector, Veridicor's Licence To Operate framework has applications across multiple industries where social and political legitimacy is critical. In energy, for example, the firm works with developers of solar, wind, and power infrastructure projects to anticipate and address community concerns before they escalate into operational delays.

In large-scale infrastructure and construction projects, Veridicor assists companies in understanding local governance dynamics and community expectations that could affect timelines or permits. Even in manufacturing, technology, and services, where public scrutiny of operations can affect reputations and regulatory compliance, the company helps organizations evaluate and strengthen the trust that enables continuity. The same principles apply to development projects and non-governmental organizations operating in sensitive communities, ensuring that social legitimacy underpins operational strategy.

A central pillar of their work is Veridicor University, a professional training platform designed to build internal capacity within organizations to manage stakeholder legitimacy proactively. The initiative equips staff and executives with the knowledge and tools required to anticipate, assess, and act on social and political risks through structured courses, workshops, and certification programs. The platform moves it from an ad hoc function to a strategic discipline, a shift that Stoddard argues is critical for industries where social license determines operational outcomes by professionalizing stakeholder engagement.

Under Stoddard's leadership, the company has cultivated a team that combines expertise in diplomacy, business strategy, and industry specialization. This multidisciplinary approach allows the firm to provide insights that are both practical and grounded in a deep understanding of local contexts. The company's approach is proactive rather than reactive, ensuring that companies can act strategically before conflicts escalate, rather than scrambling to resolve them after delays or disruptions occur.



A general view of artisanal miners working at the Shabara artisanal mine near Kolwezi in the Democratic Republic of Congo on October 12, 2022 /photo courtesy Junior Kannah / AFP

The impact of Veridicor's work is increasingly evident as the global demand for critical minerals rises and the competition for extractive resources intensifies. Projects that fail to secure broad-based support risk becoming stalled or stranded, regardless of technical or financial merit. Companies that invest in understanding and maintaining trust experience fewer disruptions, greater regulatory confidence, and more stable long-term operations. In this sense, Veridicor's Licence To Operate approach transforms what has traditionally been viewed as a social obligation into a core operational advantage, aligning business continuity with sustainable stakeholder engagement.

In a sector where tens of millions of dollars can be lost in a single week due to relational failures, the ability to anticipate and manage stakeholder expectations is no longer optional. Loren has positioned the company at the forefront of a revolution in how mining and other high-impact industries manage legitimacy through combining rigorous assessment, strategic advisory, and professional capacity building through Veridicor University

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