

RESEARCH REPORT

ALUMNI GIVING, SHIFT THE POWER & LOCALLY-LED DEVELOPMENT IN CAMEROON



With support from the Global Fund for Community Foundations



Alumni Giving, Shift the Power and Locally-led Development in Cameroon

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	1
Acknowledgement	2
1.0 Introduction	2
2.0 Literature review	4
2.1 The Concept of “Alumni Giving”	4
2.2 Alumni Giving and Locally-led Development	6
2.3 Alumni Giving and Shift the Power	8
3.0 Research Approach	11
4.0 Research Findings and Analysis	12
4.1 Participants’ Understanding of Philanthropy	13
4.2 Understanding of Alumni Giving	14
4.3 Alumni Giving and Philanthropy	15
4.4 Supporting Internal versus External Causes Through Alumni Giving.....	15
4.4.1 Why members of alumni groups give to support causes championed by the group	16
4.4.2 How members of alumni groups give	16
4.4.3 Areas of national development alumni giving contributes to.....	18
4.4.4 Alumni giving and shift the power	19
5.0 Conclusion	21
6.0 Recommendations	22
References	23



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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the concept of “Alumni Giving” in Cameroon, focusing on its relationship with locally-led development initiatives and the shift-the-power agenda. Alumni associations, made up of groups of former students from different educational institutions, are pivotal community philanthropic actors in Cameroon. These groups leverage their resources, including financial contributions, to support their alma maters and broader community needs, thus contributing significantly to local development. The research identifies alumni giving as a critical factor in enhancing community well-being, facilitating access to education and supporting health and sanitation projects. This form of giving reflects core cooperative values such as trust, solidarity and compassion. Additionally, it presents a local approach to development that contrasts with traditional, top-down methods, which often fail to fully engage local communities

and utilise their inherent capacities. This study employs a mixed-methods design to explore the extent to which alumni giving supports national development goals and complements the shift the power narrative. The findings suggest that alumni contributions have a tangible impact on local development, offering an alternative model that could be scaled up by international development partners to foster genuine, sustainable community-led growth. The analysis underscores the potential of alumni giving to bridge development divides and promote social and economic equity through localised, collective action.

Keywords: *Alumni Giving, Shift the Power, Locally-led Development, Community Philanthropy, Sustainable Development*



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The degree of local people's participation in local development and humanitarian response has become a core area of debate in the international development and humanitarian sector (Knight, 2019; Degan, 2019; Hodgson, 2020; Alexander, 2022). An intriguing conversation that has led to the emergence of related and distinct concepts that interrogate the impact of customary development approaches, models and frameworks in developing countries post-colonialism. Recently, this discussion has been greatly shaped around Shift the power, localisation, decolonisation of aid, locally-led development, philanthropy and community philanthropy. Development practitioners, scholars, thought leaders, thinkers and social change-makers from the global North and South have enthusiastically questioned mankind's inability to eradicate poverty and improve social and economic infrastructure in many countries in the global South and Africa in particular after decades of development intervention. While many blame the lack of real local participation in decision-making, programme design and implementation, others underpin the failure of many development agendas from the global North to leverage the capacity, assets, knowledge, culture and skills of the communities in less developed and middle-income countries in the implementation of programmes.

Like many countries in West Africa, Cameroon currently faces great structural, governance, social and economic development challenges (OCHA, 2019) despite benefiting from different top down-oriented development approaches since independence. From the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development Agenda, Millennium Development Goals and now Sustainable Development Goals, the ability of the government of Cameroon to foster an all-inclusive and comprehensive sustainable community development is still rapped with gross uncertainty. Recently, international engagement in Cameroon has focused more on supporting the government's development agenda with an insignificant number of programmes aimed at building on citizen assets, knowledge and capacity.

As a result, the majority of cross-generation citizens are unable to satisfy their basic survival, safety, love and self- esteem needs, talk less of self-actualisation needs as hierarchically represented by Abraham Maslow (1943). This chasm created by the inability of traditional development actors and government to improve the social infrastructure essential for citizen well-being and the achievement of global, regional and national development ambitions has prompted the emergence of many solidarity-based localised associations like alumni associations with overarching objectives to give back to their community. Through these local practices, alumni groups have been able to contribute to the social and economic advancement of the county in various ways.

Globally, systems of community giving and self-help have always existed within different cultures and traditions (Hodgson, 2020). In Cameroon, there exists a long tradition of organised giving, which provides fertile ground for the development of community philanthropy. The most prevalent of such altruistic gestures is that initiated and championed by an organised group of former schoolmates, commonly known as "Alumni" or "ex-students association" which have a common goal to collectively work for the well-being of members, mobilise resources and contribute to the development of their local community and specifically, their alma mater. In this sense, this paper describes "Alumni giving" as giving oriented towards the welfare of members and for local development - a phenomenon built on core cooperative values of trust, solidarity and compassion. The research hypothesises that Alumni giving in Cameroon advances the well-being of members and contributes to Cameroon's development agenda, relates to/complements the shift the power narrative and can be exploited by international developmental partners to shift the power, bridge the development divide and support locally-led development initiatives. This paper investigates, examines and assesses how alumni giving relates to/complements shift the power and contributes to locally-led development in Cameroon.



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2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Concept of “Alumni Giving”

Alumni giving is an evolving concept in the development sector synonymous with “individual philanthropy, a local form of giving that goes to an alma mater, family, friends and a local community (Milner et al, 2023). It serves as an alternative local approach through which alternative financial, human and technical resources are mobilised to advance shared community priorities. By far, individual giving (philanthropy) remains the largest source of giving in several countries in the world (Giving USA, 2020). It has a long history of existence in the global society and West Africa in particular. For as long as human existence, people have been massively engaged in giving of that nature. Despite the historical evidence of such practices, there exists no empirical definition of Alumni giving. It is fundamentally challenging to google search “Alumni giving” and find scholarly articles and basic expressions that convey what the concept is or what it is not.

Considering the dearth of theoretical literature and drawing from the researchers’ experiences, observations and active contribution to alumni initiatives in Cameroon, we may define alumni giving as a form of organised social giving motivated by the will to advance development priorities – education, health, water sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and environmental priorities – of an alma mater, neighbouring communities and fostering solidarity among members of an alumni group. There are several examples of such groups in Cameroon, formed by ex-students of different primary, secondary and tertiary academic institutions. The main objectives of these philanthropic groups are to provide financial assistance, education and health-related support to their alma mater and to assist themselves.

Literature on alumni giving as an essential source of finance generation reveals different reasons why alumni groups contribute to their alma mater. According to Leslie and Ramey (1988), the majority of alumni giving is driven by the desire to appreciate the institution for the education received and increase recognition of the academic benefits provided by the institution. Relatively, their motivation to give can also be viewed and understood through Abraham Maslow’s (1943) theory of human motivation.

For over eighty (80) years Maslow’s psychological theory suggests that human beings are driven by innate needs for survival, safety, love, esteem and self-actualisation in that order. His line of thought remains very relevant in the 21st century, entrenched in fine classic wisdom relevant in advancing the ideals of a ‘good society’ built on the core values of solidarity, ‘equality’, ‘democracy’ and ‘sustainability’. Alumni giving is pre-potently motivated by Abraham Maslow’s pyramid of needs. Members’ altruism depends on where they are in their own life cycle. Presumably, their contribution to improving social and economic infrastructure may be motivated by the desire to feel ‘self-actualised.’ Maslow posited that self-actualisation manifests differently and differs from person to person and group to group. For the alumni member, it is manifested by the unflinching desire to show “love to humankind” or “live up to the true meaning of life” which is found in helping others gratify their basic and psychological needs. Giving time, money, energy and knowledge is the central way that man strives to find meaning. A sense of community and interconnectedness is also something many could be missing, which is something that could only be sated through community altruism. The weight of the donations rests upon the degree of their prior satisfaction of the physiological, safety, love and esteem needs.

The membership strength of alumni groups is drawn from mainstream institutions (civil service, media, parliament, local government, political parties) and the civil society sector (local NGOs, faith groups, private businesses, community and self-help groups, new media, pressure groups, cooperatives, Academia and INGOs) creates an opportunity to drive transformative change. Its diversity mirrors the philosophy of the 45° change described by Neal Lawson (2019) where “bottom-up meets top-down so that people and organisations on either side of the line interact and work together in new and transformative ways.” The contribution of alumni groups in improving the social and economic infrastructure in Cameroon promotes economic growth and development, likewise, instilling a sense of community belonging and fostering social interaction among community members. More specifically, for decades, alumni have used their donations to support critical components of social infrastructure projects like education, health care and WASH on school campuses. As pointed out by (Singh, 2023), a robust education system provides access to quality education to all, regardless of their individual socio-economic background and helps to reduce inequality and promote a sense of community, while healthcare reduces mortality rates and prevents the spread of infectious diseases.

A good example of an alumni group which has evolved and has made tremendous contributions to the growth of its alma mater and community is the Sasse Old Boys Association (SOBA), a well-known local philanthropic group with four chapters in the diaspora—one in Nigeria, one in America and two in the United Kingdom (The Sun, 2023, pp.11-12). Fundamentally, the philanthropic group aims to provide financial assistance to Sasse College and to assist the college in mobilising some funds for its critical projects. In an interview with The Sun Newspaper on 11 April 2023, the SOBA president general highlighted different areas of need in addition to the provision of yearly scholarships supported by the group in Cameroon ranging from “school-roads”, “health” and “WASH”, to create a better accommodative and healthy environment for quality learning (Norbert and Simon,2023).

Similar to SOBA, the Association of Soppo Baptist Ex-students (ASOBEXS), is an association of former students of Baptist High School (BHS) in Buea, headquarters of the Southwest Region of Cameroon. In November 2021, the United Kingdom Chapter constructed and donated an “ultramodern borehole” and “Geology laboratory” to the students of Baptist High School (BHS) and approved neighbouring communities around the school (Julius, 2022.). The project was aimed at providing sustainable, clean, safe and portable water to the BHS Campus including the administrative building, staff quarters, dormitories, kitchen/refectory as well as publicly approved areas near the campus. As revealed by a representative of the group during an interview with The Horizon Newspaper, “alumni giving” is motivated by “love” and direct ties with the school and community - a motivating factor that resonates with Maslow. These groups are playing an increasingly active role in financing school-based and community-related projects to improve learning and living conditions and promote local development. The Sacred Heart Ex-Students’ Association (SHESA), created in 1972 and revived in 2005, is one of these alumni groups with branches and chapters in different regions of the country and parts of the world tremendously contributing resources for the benefit of their alma mater.

Logically, alumni giving could also be seen as an act of local philanthropy aimed at mobilising resources necessary for community development. According to Tchouassi and Sikod (2013) in a study conducted on “Giving to Help and Helping to Give”, philanthropy is simply the practice of “giving, of sharing and helping”. That is, a voluntary means that any culture, social group and individual uses to redistribute financial and other resources to promote some collective good and social well-being. Barbara Nost (2019) emphasises the need for inclusive thoughts and rethinking around philanthropy, given that it has much to do with “love for humankind”, which is not the preserve of the rich. She posited that “Philanthropy must be viewed as communities taking stock of their assets and resources and determining how to use these to attain a better life”. The effectiveness of such practice is directly predicted by the willingness

to give, alumni involvement, understanding of the economic environment, community priorities, charitable preferences, receipt of a scholarship and capacity to give (Hoyt, 2004). While there are significant differences in terms of goal, form, shape, size context and geographical application of alumni giving or philanthropy, the goal is to mobilise financial, technical and material resources to foster the development and sustainable growth of diverse local communities.

Historically, giving to one's alma mater constitutes one of the greatest sources of resource mobilisation in some economically advanced countries. For instance, in the US, individual gifts account for 67% of all giving (Giving US, 2020). In several countries of the global North like the United States of America, Canada, Britain and Australia, alumni giving/contribution has been one of the major sources of funding for scholarship support to economically disadvantaged families and individuals from low-income countries seeking research subsidies and educational advancement. Although alumni giving is the largest form of high-impact voluntary giving in Cameroon, it remains a source of income that has not been fully developed, understood and exploited by development actors.

2.2 Alumni Giving and Locally-led Development

At a time when a growing movement of a multitude of actors from diverse sectors of society is challenging the complex international aid and development structures, the terms "locally-led", "localisation" and "decolonisation" are the most compelling jargons that can be traced within literature. The idea of locally-led development is as old as the history of the Marshal Plan designed by the US government to foster socio-economic development in Europe post-World War II (Ingram, 2022). A plan that saw the United States and Europe working together to revive the European economy. Since then, the concept has increasingly become a significant topic of discussion in the international development sector and widely used since the 2016 Grand Bargain. Since it emerged, mainstream international and local change-makers

around the globe have been grappling with the term "locally-led" for a very long time. An attitude described by Kelvin (2023) as being "co-opted". It is one of those concepts in the global development lingo that has been co-opted by small, medium and larger international development organisations at different epochs, spaces, scenarios and contexts.

To better grasp the nexus between locally-led and alumni giving this paper trumps alumni groups as community philanthropic actors that work to voluntarily mobilise needed resources to advance specific national development goals and local priorities. It is difficult and blatant hypocrisy to imagine the meaning of locally-led without referencing other related concepts like "localisation" and "shift the power." However, the inescapable thoughts that race to mind when we think of locally-led and other related concepts are the quest to interrogate whether they are simply nebulous or oxymoronic terms or both. This paper sees locally-led as synonymous with localisation, understood as a process of supporting and strengthening local communities and enabling them to unleash their inherent power to achieve a more meaningful sustainable change and progress. This to Gibson (2019) can only be achieved with a holistic change in the funding mechanism, donors' understanding of local context, real equal partnerships and a greater understanding of the capacity of local communities and local organisations. Emmanuel. K, Thomas. Y, Nancy. K et al. (2023) view localisation as a path through which support could be garnered from individuals, organisations and local communities to support the ability of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) (community actors) to achieve their goals.

Similarly, according to Wall & Hedlund (2016) 'locally-led' specifically refers to "work that originates from local actors or is designed to support locally emerging initiatives". This can be likened to alumni giving in Cameroon. Despite the sophisticated debate about what locally-led is and what it is not, traditional international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) continue to use the word as a perfect alibi to ensure the flow of money from the global North to the global South with little or no rationale of ensuring local actors become autonomous and able to decide for themselves. Kevin (2023) argues that co-opting the

term locally-led is not only unjust and unfair to real community-led initiatives but also crystal “branded imperialism”. To him, real locally-led nonprofits are the “most unseen, unheard and underfunded” “nonprofits with headquarters in the global South, where the CEO/founders have few donor networks outside their community/country”. This is in sharp contrast with the branding and practice of INGOs entirely based in the global North working in the global South and those with satellite offices in the global South who make themselves very visible and conspicuous in the nonprofit space. Alumni groups in Cameroon with branches and chapters in America, Europe, Asia and Nigeria working to assist the government in achieving its development goals resonate with Kevin’s description of true locally-led nonprofit initiatives.

Voluntary donations from these community philanthropic groups are used to fund projects of common interest in a community. In describing the power dynamics that exist within communities, Hassan (2023) typologises community into four broad categories: indigenous community (the original people of a given locality); local community (the people who live, reside, or have nationality in a given locality); hyper-local community (the people who live, reside, or are registered in a given sub-locality) and a broader community which refers to the people that span geographic boundaries but maintain legal or relational or cultural ties to one of the above communities including the diaspora. Membership in alumni groups encompasses indigenous, local, hyper-local and people in the diaspora. The development of advanced communication technology and online fundraising platforms facilitates the participation of diaspora alumni chapters and branches in group activities. A typical example of an alumni group that capitalised on existing sophisticated communication technologies to raise finances is St Paul’s College Ex-student Association (SPESA) Global. Through a modern fundraising platform, SPESA (2022) fundraised £15,000 to help in financing a WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) project in the alma mater.

The money raised was used to construct 15 modern toilets and showers, 9 urinals and solar panels to power reticulated water supply and wash facilities that would help to mitigate the increased risk of disease and insecurity, especially for female students in St. Paul’s student community. Even though the fundraisers are not based in Cameroon, they utilised an approach that allows all SPESA members around the world to donate to the group’s project, an initiative that would be considered atypical if taken by local NGOs. The apolitical nature of NGOs which restricts them from financing and driving certain development architecture projects like the construction of schools, hospitals and WASH provides alumni groups an added advantage over local NGOs. This helps in positioning alumni groups as real local actors with the capacity to collaborate with local and international NGOs in achieving its 2030 pledge of “a fairer future in which all people’s needs are met and their rights upheld, governments fulfil their responsibilities and civil society flourishes” (Alexander, 2023, P4C 2030). Alumni groups not only complement the works of real locally-led organisations in Cameroon, but they have local capacity that can be leveraged by the government to effectively meet the needs of people who matter.

With the adoption of the National Development Strategy 2020-2030 and informed by the country’s decentralised agenda enshrined in Cameroon’s 1996 amended constitution, Cameroon’s aspiration to foster development within the country’s 360 municipal councils in areas of healthcare, education and social welfare remains a priority agenda for the government and citizens. The strategy which enunciates the country’s domestic and international economic, social and environmental commitments is structured around four (4) main pillars which include structural transformation of the economy; human development capital; promotion of employment and economic integration; and governance and strategic management. For decades majority of Alumni philanthropy has been directed towards the

achievement of the second pillar– human capital development, developed around five (5) guidelines: education, training and employability; research and innovation; health and nutrition; access to basic social amenities; and social protection. With regard to education, training and employability alumni groups like the Sacred Heart Ex-students Association (SHESA) has tremendously contributed to facilitating access and improving the quality of education. Since its creation in 1972, SHESA has successfully mobilised sufficient funds that facilitate the building of a modern library for the alma mater, donations of computer labs and laboratory equipment, award of scholarships, assistance of less privileged students, donation of bands and the creation of a landmark microfinance institution (Timothy, 2022). The established microfinance (SHESACCUL) provides employment opportunities for members and graduates from the alma mater, provides low-interest education loans and funds agricultural and achievable business plans and ideas (SHESA,2022).

Alumni giving goes beyond contributing to development to countering a controversial idea of 'white saviourism' which reinforces stereotypes whereby others (whites) give and others (global South) passively receive (Betty, 2021). This form of local philanthropy demonstrates a local commitment to mobilise funds and provide basic services for their communities without assistance from classic and mega-donors from the global North. Alumni giving is a typical example of an action taken by communities without assistance from the government or international NGOs, that demonstrates resiliency and capabilities to survive and achieve common goals without depending on external support. Their contribution helps in meeting health and educational needs and giving people a decent wage and a job to pay for the basic needs of their children. Unlike NGOs who are apolitical and restricted from engaging in contributing to fostering certain development architecture like schools, hospitals and WASH, the alumni who finance projects in these domains have these added advantages over local NGOs. Without

financial, material and technical support from the global North these community philanthropy groups can achieve significant development milestones for their communities. Despite their contribution to fostering different development goals, little is known about them in terms of their financial contribution to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GPD).

2.3 Alumni Giving and Shift the Power

Conversations on shift the power and locally-led development continue to shed more light on the importance of intentionally involving local people, considering and weaving their narratives and resources in the delivery of international development programmes. According to Hilary Gilbert (2018), one of the leading voices advocating for real, meaningful and sustainable development, any development process that refuses to recognise the inherent power found in the local community or share power with local people is bound to nose-dive. Her assertions provide a well-grounded rationale why emerging economies in the global South are unable to develop or combat the pandemic of poverty that has consumed the souls of their people despite the diverse global development agendas implemented in the region post-European imperialism.

Cameroon currently faces great socio-economic development challenges despite benefiting from different top down-oriented development approaches embraced by the country. From the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development Agenda, Millennium Development Goals and now Sustainable Development Goals, the ability of the government of Cameroon to foster an all-inclusive and comprehensive sustainable community development would still be rapped with gross uncertainty if development practitioners continue with business as usual. The chasm created by the inability of the government to improve the social infrastructure essential for citizen well-being and

the achievement of global, regional and national development ambitions prompted the emergence of several solidarity-based localised associations like alumni associations with overarching objectives to give back to their community. A form of organised social giving is motivated by the will to advance the development priorities in domains such as education, health, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), road infrastructure and environmental priorities – of Alma Mater. It is also spurred by the desire to contribute to development in neighbouring communities and fostering solidarity among members. In some cases, these groups are regrouping themselves under a much bigger umbrella like the Confederation of the Catholic Alumni made up of different alumni groups under the Roman Catholic church-run educational institutions.

This local giving initiative represents a creative means used by the local people (ex-students associations) to unravel the inherent power of the local communities to determine their development trajectory, as highlighted in point four of the [#ShiftThePower manifesto](#) for change. It further shows the denial of the people to surrender the development of their community to the government or external bodies but also to be vectors of development. Irrespective of the different appellations assigned to themselves, whether SOBA, ASOBEXS, SPESA, SHESA, or SAESA they represent a new form of democratic community philanthropic networks with power to foster meaningful community development. These groups complement the shift the power agenda by voluntarily contributing and participating in their own development process.

Shift the Power is an atypical robust movement seeking to change, challenge, re-structure and reform traditional aid practices and institutional philanthropy by advocating for a 'more equitable people-led development' (Hodgson, 2020; Bond, 2021; Knight, 2019). Generally, it is a concept that describes a novel type of development that is negotiated, participatory, widely owned and based

on global solidarity and distributed leadership. According to Stephanie Draper (2019), the CEO of BOND, shift the power counters the classical ideals of 'power over' and favours the idea of 'power with'. Based on the power dynamics raised by Draper, Amitabh Behar, CEO of Oxfam India argues that it is not about shifting power but more about building power from below. However, to Knight, such a necessary power shift can only be possible through a system lens. Shift the power challenges the traditional 'old order of development' that is a top-down paradigm where funding and decision-making stream from the larger development aid industry from the global North. Arguably, alumni giving provides satisfactory answers to the fundamental question asked by #shiftthepower champions across the globe: What does shift the power look like for the local communities? Decisions on which local community (alma mater) needs to be prioritised and why as well as what to raise funds for and how are made by alumni groups without external influence.

Though money is the main fuel to their activities, their actions, solidarity and accomplishments project the invisible strength, power and engagement entrenched in the global South. The philosophy of the shift the power movement sprung from earlier discussions on racial injustice, decolonisation of development and humanitarian aid and power imbalance deeply rooted in mainstream global governance systems (World Trade, World Bank, United Nations and International Monetary Fund (Degan, 2019; the New Humanitarian, 2022).

The contribution of alumni groups in improving social and economic infrastructure in Cameroon shows profound evidence of Edwards' (2019) assertion that *"Local people are coming together in order to take back control of their own communities, of their own destinies: fighting not just against the often vengeful ineptitude of local and national politics and business but also against agencies previously assumed to be allies in the struggles against poverty, marginalisation and vulnerability – the international development sector itself."*

Conversely, conventional development frameworks and programmes have failed to focus on local needs and priorities. And often regards local participation as fripperies. The unprecedented call and emphasis on the need to do development differently is largely informed by the rationale that many development interventions have limited impact because of the lack of involvement of local communities and organisations in the process (Emmanuel. K, Thomas. Y, Nancy. K et al. 2023). In a society like Cameroon where a significant majority of citizen's basic needs (the base of Maslow's pyramid) are extremely far to reach, development actors must do things differently if truly the primary purpose for the existence of pro-development institutions is to promote social welfare and improve human wellbeing. As Maslow pointed out everyone in our society (with a few pathological exceptions) has a need or desire to satisfy their physiological, safety, love, self-esteem needs and attain self-actualisation or move beyond self-actualisation like the elderly political leaders in West and Central Africa who have gotten all but still want the icing on the cake.

The inherent nature of every human organism in both the urban and local areas in the global South is to gratify these needs, which are impossible to achieve without different development actors (government, UN Agencies, INGOs and donors) putting local actors at the centre of command and response. This would mean considering any local development agenda that ostracised the effective participation of local people as a serious and insidious problem.

The contributions of these groups show evidence that local people (indigenous people) do not only have the skills, knowledge, network, relationships and other resources to bring about transformative change in their communities but also the love, confidence and self-belief to do so. It further demonstrates that this could be a force for good if nurtured and properly channelled. As pointed out in point six of the #shiftthepower manifesto for change, any meaningful and well-intended external financial or technical support can only achieve lasting impact if it 'recognises, respects and builds on local resources and assets, rather than overlooks, undermines and displaces.

Emerging associations may well have a much deeper legitimacy and the great voice that comes with using their own resources and owning what is happening, is the only way of sustaining change (Edward, 2019). Beyond the ideals of the shift the power manifesto, Maslow assumes that for any social group to be able to effectively meet the needs of the local population some preconditions need to exist with such a group. He regards conditions as the freedom to speak, freedom to do what one wishes so long as no harm is done to others, freedom to express oneself, freedom to investigate and seek information, freedom to defend oneself, justice, fairness, honesty and orderliness in the group as immediate prerequisites for the satisfaction of basic needs.



3.0 RESEARCH APPROACH

The purpose of the study is to examine how alumni giving relates to the shift the power agenda and contributes to local development in Cameroon. In addition, the study seeks to find out or measure the extent to which alumni giving can serve as an additional source of resources that could be utilised to advance national development priorities and promote the shift the power movement. The study employed a mixed-method design as a means to adequately address the central research question. According to Hanson et al (2005), mixed methods research enriches the research findings, improves trustworthiness and increases the depth and breadth of a study. We utilised concurrent transformative design, a design which empowered us to also take an advocacy stand as researchers; and concurrently collect qualitative and quantitative data for the study using a single data collection instrument.

Data collection and presentation of findings are governed by two philosophical assumptions, post positivism and constructivism, though the latter dominates. The common worldview held by proponents of these paradigms is the idea that there are multiple realities (Patton, 2015). In addition, constructivism further advances the belief that knowledge is context-based and interpreted based on individual experiences. Based on the conservative worldview the meaning we make out of the concept of 'alumni giving', 'shift the power', 'local development' and interpretation of data is largely informed by our years of experiences, observations and active contribution to alumni initiatives in Cameroon. We go beyond the classic idea of contributing to the body of knowledge in the field of philanthropy and individual altruism to make an advocacy claim that alumni giving relates to the shift the power agenda and has the potential to foster local development in Cameroon. Also, we employed mixed methods to neutralise and minimise the weaknesses of the individual methods, i.e. quantitative and qualitative approaches (Creswell et al, 2003). Beyond mitigating the disadvantages that exist in both methods, we equally used them because of the strengths they possess.

Primary data was collected through a survey, composed of open-ended and closed-ended questions in a single data collection instrument. Using survey monkey, the questionnaires were shared via multi-social media platforms including emails, LinkedIn, Facebook and WhatsApp to participants who had gone through primary, secondary and tertiary education and belong to at least one alumni group in Cameroon. The method of survey dissemination also enabled the Cameroonian diaspora population who belong to different chapters of alumni groups to participate in the study. This enabled us to better understand the relationship between the concept of alumni giving, shift the power and locally-led development. The study also relied, where necessary on informal sources such as newspaper articles. Based on the concurrent transformative design used in the study, data is analysed separately and merged at the interpretive stage. The importance of data integration is largely emphasised by Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) and Greene et al. (1989).

Furthermore, the quantitative and qualitative methods play unequal roles in this study. The qualitative method has a dominant role while the quantitative method enabled the researchers to have an initial measurable appreciation of some of the variables explored within the study. This enabled researchers to leverage both qualitative and quantitative findings derived from the study to make meaningful analyses and draw worthwhile conclusions in the study. More importantly, an early literature review on the subject under study made us better comprehend the objective truth that neither the quantitative nor qualitative methods could be used in solitary in addressing the central research question (how does alumni giving complement the shift of the power agenda and contribute to the development of Cameroon?). Simply put, one method cannot effectively address the phenomenon because each has its strengths and weaknesses. Our rationale for using both methods was due to their complementarity capacity. We gauged that both methodologies are effective in addressing different parts but in the end, they complement each other to better understand the overall phenomenon of alumni giving.



Image by Frantisek Krejci from Pixabay

4.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The need to have an empirical understanding of how alumni giving can contribute to national development and the shift the power agenda became more evident in recent years in recognition of the growing number of alumni groups in the country. Moreso, many of such groups engage in activities that add value to society's growth in varying ways. Some of these include the offering of scholarships to students, construction of infrastructure within their alma mater, supporting teachers and in some cases retired teachers in their alma mater, among others.

To gain this understanding, evidence was gathered from 164 respondents through a survey questionnaire that comprised of closed ended and open-ended questions. Three respondents were below 25 years of age constituting 1.83% of the total number of respondents. 63 respondents were between the ages of 25 and 35 giving a percentage value of 38.41 while 92 respondents were between the ages of 35 and 60 years being the highest proportion of respondents with 56.10%. There were six respondents who were above 60 years of age making up 3.66% of the respondent population. From the survey, it is evident that persons within the age group of 35 and 60 make up the most involved group in alumni giving engagements.

This could be attributed to the fact that many within this age have gained financial independence. It could further imply that many within this age group have become more conscious and aware of some inherent human responsibilities centred around giving back to their community. Such "conscious age of giving" resonates with the classic African belief that "A person is a person through other persons;" that is, 'Ubuntu.'

Table 1: Age distribution of respondents

Below 25	1.83%	3
25 - 35	38.41%	63
35 - 60	56.10%	92
Above 60	3.66%	6
Total	100%	164

Source: Alumni giving survey data for Cameroon, 2023

89.02% of the 164 respondents representing 146 respondents attested to the fact that they belong to an alumni group while 18 respondents, being 10.98% do not belong to an alumni group. Out of the 146 respondents, 40 of them belong to one alumni group while 124 of them belong to two or more alumni groups. These alumni groups are mainly those representing institutions at the secondary or tertiary levels of education.

4.1 Participants' Understanding of Philanthropy

Interestingly, respondents showed that they hold varying understanding of philanthropy. Some 87 respondents indicated that philanthropy implies giving of money, time, material, effort and technical assistance for a social cause with an additional 35 respondents indicating that philanthropy means giving financial and material resources for a social cause. For 45 respondents, philanthropy means showing love and selflessness for mankind. As a respondent puts it, "Love and selflessness to mankind englobes everything. When we love each other, we will provide for the poor, assist the sick and support the deprived" (Alumni Giving Survey respondent).

Expanding further on what philanthropy entails to them, participants attributed philanthropy to imply sacrificing for the wellbeing of others. This, respondents attributed to the view that philanthropy emanates from love and selflessness. A respondent explained as follows;

"When you desire to promote the welfare of others then you indirectly or directly show love to others. It's difficult to promote one's welfare without love. You should be loving and kind at heart" (Alumni Giving Survey respondent).

Another respondent further explained as follows; ***"The second response fits best as a definition to the term philanthropy in my perspective because the act of giving is based on the love an individual has for another. Giving is a manifestation of that love and the purpose is helping the other to grow, to access better living conditions and open him/her to greater opportunities"*** (Alumni Giving Survey respondent).

However, some explained that philanthropy is the act of giving to the poor and needy by someone who has passion for humanity. As a respondent puts it,

"Philanthropy is a moral and social action aimed at improving the lives and livelihoods of individuals and communities" (Alumni Giving Survey respondent).

Survey respondents albeit demonstrated the interconnectedness between philanthropy and alumni giving. While a predominant understanding of philanthropy to mean giving of money, time, material, effort and technical assistance for a social cause was demonstrated by participants in their responses, some respondents specifically demonstrated how alumni giving fits within the philanthropy spectrum. A respondent explains that philanthropy implies ***"assisting in whatever way possible to keep a going concern for my alma matter"***.

The latter is supported by a respondents' view that holds that, philanthropy ***"implies giving of money to support a project of your former school or your time and material or technical effort depending on what you want to give. This should be understood that in doing so, selflessness and love are the driving force"***.

Another respondent adds that, philanthropy implies ***"helping people in order to promote their wellbeing, be it social, economically, financially, especially financially through donation of money or gifts which must be for a good cause"*** (Alumni Giving Survey respondent).

This understanding holds strongly in several alumni groups that exercise giving models that seek to support classmates to achieve planned and unplanned situations they encounter. This is evident through contributions and participation in significant events in members lives such as weddings, birth and death celebrations, among others.

4.2 Understanding of Alumni Giving

Furthermore, respondents shared perspectives on what alumni giving means. On the whole, they considered alumni giving to be the same as being philanthropy, specifically within the settings or scope of an alumni group. Simply put, some described alumni giving as community philanthropy by alumni groups.

A respondent posits that alumni giving is giving back, helping members, the alma mater and society in general when there is a need. It involves giving one's technical know-how or money or time for a social cause.

A respondent described alumni giving as, “... ***giving back to the community which helped you acquire knowledge to be who you are now***” (*Alumni Giving Survey respondent*).

Alumni giving involves giving practices that manifest within alumni groups. An alumni group consists of ex-students who come together to build and foster developmental projects for the interest of their former school. They also engage in assisting each other in times of need. They often regroup themselves to connect for better opportunities in future and to propose solutions to solving societal problems.

From the survey responses, it can be understood that alumni giving seeks to achieve three principal goals as outlined below;

1. To promote the wellbeing of members of the group. Here alumni group members give to support one another based on the relationships built as a family during their stay in the academic institution they attended together.
2. To contribute to the progress of the institution that contributed in equipping them with knowledge and skills. Alumni giving implies giving back to the school or institution that had

an impact in their lives. Hence, members of an alma mater come together to contribute and support their alma mater. This could be in the form of building infrastructure, providing support to former teachers and prospective students. They therefore carry out projects in view of developing their past institutions of study through ex-student associations.

3. To contribute to the overall advancement of society wherein alumni members avail themselves to provide basic social amenities to the needy.

An overwhelming 91.84% of respondents indicated that they support or contribute to initiatives that the alumni groups which they belong to promote. They further indicated the initiatives their alumni groups tend to support. Most of the respondents (34.82%) indicated that they support initiatives that benefit their alma-mater (see point 2 above). In this light, they either provide scholarships to students, construct facilities in their alma mater or provide financial resources to the institution.

This was closely followed by those who support causes pertaining to members and/or relatives of members of alumni groups who make up 33.93% (see point 1 above). This is being done through support to members to celebrate births and birthdays of children and in times of sickness or death of members or close relatives.

25.90% of the respondents indicated that they support initiatives that could either benefit a community, a non-governmental organisation or the nation. Through this, they support orphanages and construct or reconstruct health facilities in communities.

4.3 Alumni Giving and Philanthropy

The study provides a further understanding of the relationship between alumni giving and philanthropy. The study interrogated participants' understanding of philanthropy and alumni giving from an experiential view.

In an effort to understand what philanthropy means to respondents, 61.27% of the respondents considered philanthropy to involve the act of giving of money, time, material, effort and technical assistance for a social cause while 31.69% considered philanthropy to be the act of showing love and selflessness for mankind. Some 24.65% of the respondents considered philanthropy to mean giving financial and material resources for a social cause. This demonstrates that respondents have an appreciable understanding of what philanthropy is.

Expanding further, a respondent explained that philanthropy is ***"helping people in order to promote their wellbeing, be it socially, economically, financially, especially financially through donation of money or gifts which must be for a good cause"***.

This was further enriched by another respondent who explained that ***"philanthropy is a moral and social action aimed at improving the lives and livelihoods of individuals and communities. It can be financial, material, technical, educational etc"*** (Alumni Giving Survey respondent).

Delving into respondents' understanding of alumni giving, the study gathered that, ***"alumni giving most at times is giving back firstly to the school/establishment that made you who you are. ...It also involves giving to a wider audience depending on the alumni motives. It usually comes in variety of ways and forms"*** (Alumni Giving Survey respondent).

These varying ways and forms through which alumni giving can be expressed is well captured by the views of other respondents.

"Alumni giving in my view refers to the financial and material donations made by its members to support their school of origin (alma mater) or an economic entity in their locality", a respondent explained.

Within the scope of alumni giving, a respondent explained that philanthropy entails contributions made to and participation in significant events in members' lives such as during weddings, birth and death celebrations.

From the above, it can therefore be understood that alumni giving is an arm of philanthropy. As earlier stated in this study, alumni giving could also be seen as an act of local philanthropy aimed at mobilising resources necessary for community development. This is further justified by a respondent who asserts that alumni giving is ***"same as being philanthropic, but within the settings or scope of an alumni group"*** (Alumni Giving Survey respondent).

4.4 Supporting Internal versus External Causes Through Alumni Giving

Findings from the study also revealed areas of interest which alumni groups skew their philanthropic interests towards. From the table below, respondents indicated that most of the interest of alumni members is geared towards giving to their alma mater as indicated by 34.82% of the respondents. This is closely followed by interests in supporting causes pertaining to members and or relatives of members of alumni groups often pertaining to parents, spouses, children and in some cases, siblings. These can be categorised as internal causes which attract the most of alumni groups' philanthropic interests.

However, alumni groups also engage in activities that benefit the community. 20.54% of respondents are of the view that alumni groups equally pay attention to this. And they also give to non-governmental organisations and engage in income generating activities. These can be categorised as external causes alumni groups give to.

Table 2: Areas of need alumni groups respond to
What broad areas of need does the alumni group you belong to support?

Areas of interest	Responses
Causes pertaining to members and or relatives of members of alumni group	33.93%
Initiatives that benefit the alma-mater	34.82%
Initiatives that benefit the community or nation	20.54%
Anon-governmental organisation (NGO) in Cameroon	5.36%
Income generating activities	5.36%

Source: Alumni giving survey data for Cameroon, 2023



Fig 1: Reasons why people give to alumni groups
 Source: Alumni giving survey data for Cameroon, 2023

It is evident that their passion for the causes driven by the alumni groups stands out as the predominant reason for members’ drive to support causes driven by alumni groups with a percentage of 24. 23% of respondents see it as a responsibility being a member of the group to support initiatives promoted by the group while 21% do so because of their love for their alma mater. 13% of respondents promote the philanthropic initiatives of the groups owing to their

It is worth noting that, while all the above causes are valuable, causes that fall within the external category constitute those that can be used as a vital basis to leverage the significant potential alumni giving has to contribute to national development. This will be discussed later in this study.

4.4.1 Why members of alumni groups give to support causes championed by the group

Sequel to the above, respondents shared their reasons why they support initiatives promoted by their alumni groups as presented in the chart below.

- **13%** I am loyal to my alumni group.
- **21%** Because of the level I have for my alma mater.
- **24%** I am passionate about the cause they are championing.
- **23%** I see it as a responsibility as a member of of the group.
- **8%** I like the way the leadership/coordinators of the group communicate with me/us.
- **11%** I like the way the group is transparent about my support to their work.

loyalty to the group. In recognition of coordinated efforts within the group, some 8% of respondents use this as a basis to support their alumni groups’ philanthropic initiatives while 11% attribute their giving to the transparency of the leadership.

4.4.2 How members of alumni groups give

Philanthropy is sometimes attributed to rich people giving money to the poor. However, trends and reports have shown that, for decades, Africans have been involved in philanthropy. This they do by devoting their money, time, talents and expertise for free and for the benefits of their communities.

Alumni giving manifests itself in different forms. It can take the form of giving in both financial and through moral support to build a community. In some contexts, it is done through academic orientation, career guidance and even ideas on how to develop the community. The survey respondents provided insights as to how giving is predominantly carried out through alumni groups.

As depicted in the chart below, alumni groups promote philanthropic agendas through different means. Most of them carry out their philanthropic gestures by providing financial resources (money) as indicated by 73.68% of respondents. Some give materials (53.51%) while others allocate time (45.61%) or their expertise (38.60%) to promote causes championed by their alumni groups.

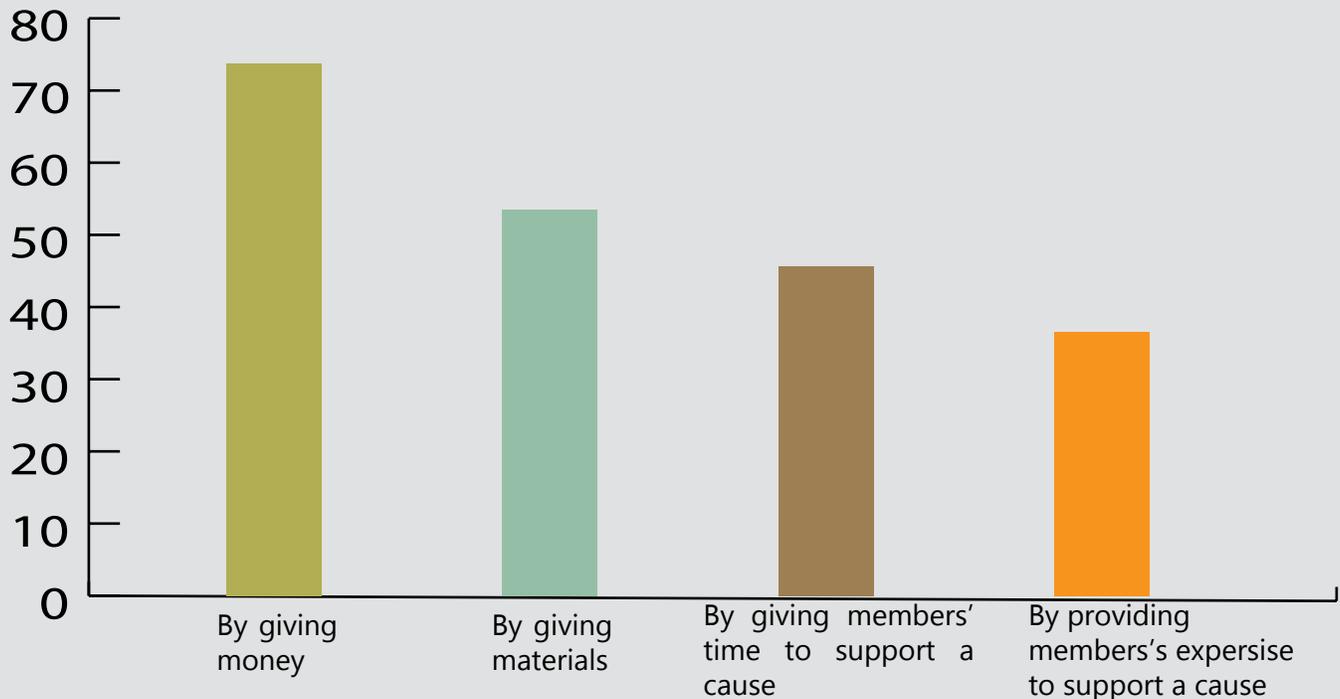


Fig 2: How alumni groups support social causes in Cameroon
 Source: Alumni giving survey data for Cameroon, 2023

Recognising the different forms of giving within alumni groups, this study further quizzed to understand the ideal forms of giving that could better contribute to national development.

Interestingly, respondents are of the view that if more members of alumni groups invest their expertise to support causes championed by their alumni groups, more can be gained in terms of scaling up national development. This is evident as 42% of respondents expressed this view. Ironically, data gathered from this study shows that members of alumni groups rather give money to support causes promoted by

their alumni groups (73.68%) than they dedicate their expertise (38.60%) to promote these causes. Alumni giving and national development

This study explored the nexus between alumni giving and national development. It is important to note that here, national development is driven by citizens of the country, hence, locally led development.

Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that alumni giving contributes to national development. 62% of respondents were very positive of this with half of this respondent population stating that alumni giving contributes to national development to a very high extent and to a high extent respectively. Only 12% of respondents were of the view that alumni giving contributes to national development to a low extent as depicted in the diagram that follows.

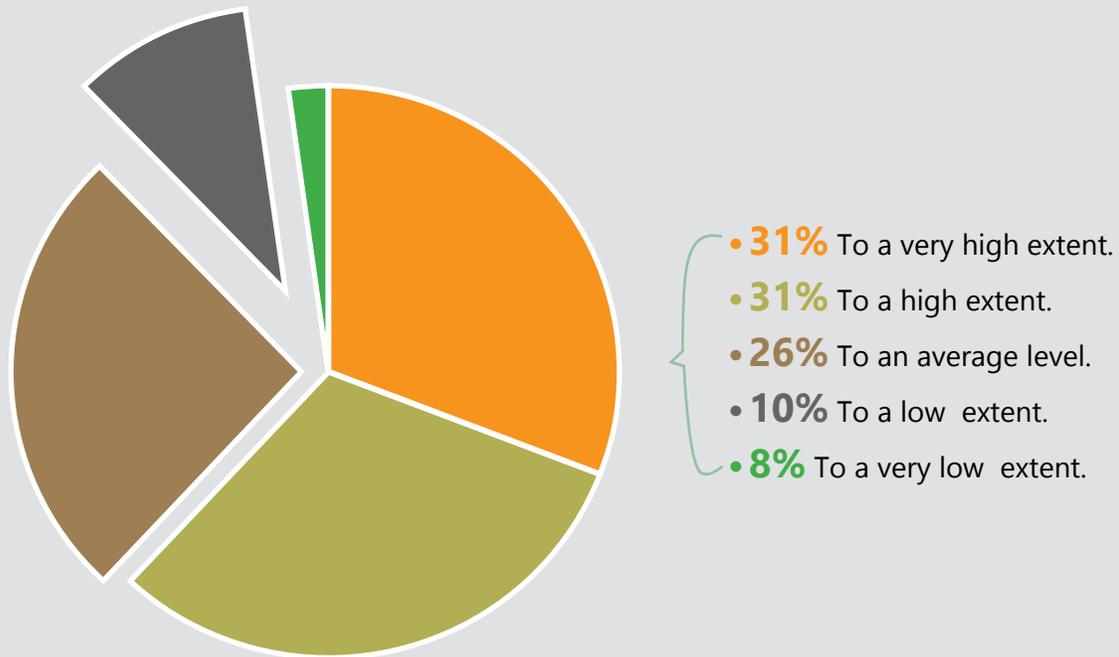


Fig 3: Extent to which alumni giving can contribute to national development

Source: Alumni giving survey data for Cameroon, 2023

Given that the nexus between alumni giving and national development has been established, findings from the study further reveal the different forms of alumni giving which, according to respondents, would make a significant contribution to national development efforts. From the diagram below, respondents do affirm that, members’ expertise, giving money, dedicating members’ time and giving materials are equally important in contributing to bolster national development efforts in the country.

Expertise of members devoted to support was highlighted as the most valuable way through which alumni giving can make significant milestones to national development efforts with 42% of respondents indicating so. As a respondent puts it, “skills/human capital are necessary for national development.” This was closely followed by members giving money to support a cause which attracted 32% of responses.

4.4.3 Areas of national development alumni giving contributes to

This study further provided evidence on the domains of national development which alumni groups have the potential of creating more impact.

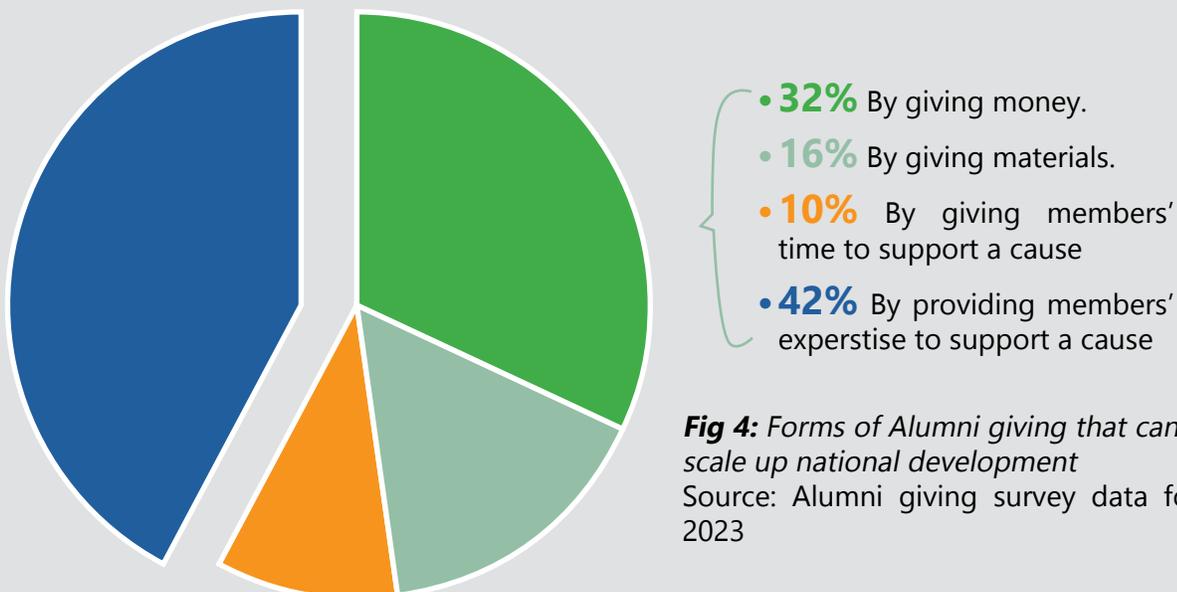


Fig 4: Forms of Alumni giving that can contribute to scale up national development

Source: Alumni giving survey data for Cameroon, 2023

According to 25% respondents, the domain of education stands out as one that alumni groups can make significant strides in contributing to improve. Economic empowerment and group members' welfare gained 16% each of the responses while health and youth empowerment stood at 15% each. Women's empowerment attracted 9% of the responses.

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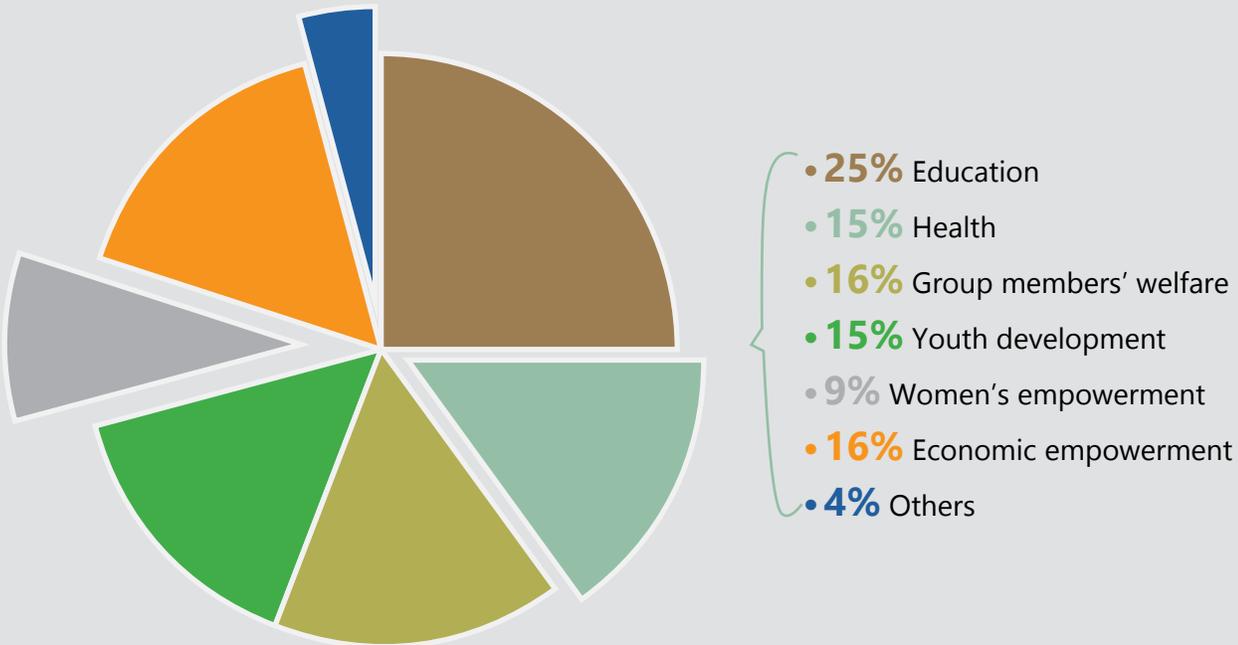


Fig 5: Domains of national development where Alumni groups can create more impact
Source: Alumni giving survey data for Cameroon, 2023

With a quarter of the respondents indicating that education holds much potential in enabling alumni giving to make meaningful contribution to national development, it avails a window of opportunity alumni groups can take advantage of. As a respondent explains, ***“if an alumni builds a school in a village for instance, many learners will benefit from the academic structure and will become industrious in future which benefits the community and nation. Thus, the nation gains in development as the resources that the nation would have needed to use for the school building are channelled elsewhere.”***

The choice of education was further justified by the added value such investments can bring in terms of human capital development for the country. As a respondent put it, “skills/human capital are

necessary for national development. Nurturing skills development through scholarships and bursaries and support of educational programmes and structures is very essential for nation building.”

4.4.4 Alumni giving and shift the power

Evidence from prior analysis holds that alumni giving can contribute to national development. Respondents further agree that alumni giving can, to a very high extent contribute to national development. By devoting members' expertise, contributing money, materials and members' time, alumni giving stands as a valuable force to scale up national development. Exploring the extent to which alumni giving can contribute to strengthening capacities of national development actors, respondents overwhelmingly posit that the capacities of national development actors (especially those in the not-for-profit sector) can be significantly strengthened through alumni giving efforts. This view is held by about 91% of the respondents with the majority of respondents (35%) indicating that this can be realised to a very high extent. (see diagram below).

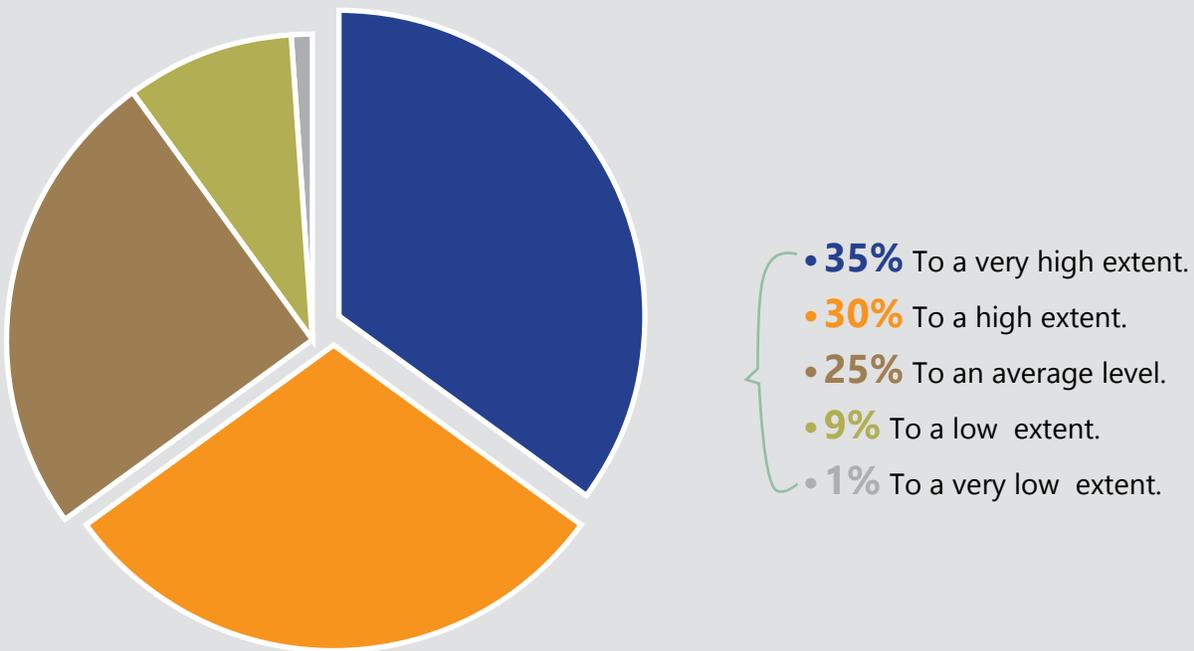


Fig 6: Extent to which alumni giving can contribute to strengthen the capacities of national development actors

Source: Alumni giving survey data for Cameroon, 2023

Hence, if members of alumni groups devote their expertise, their time, the money and material they contribute to efforts geared towards strengthening the capacities of national development actors in the country, it can go a long way to equip these actors with the requisite skills needed to accomplish their missions and scale up national development.

Recognising that the development of a nation lies in the hands of its people and the government, respondents argue that **“many more people will be trained and empowered to become a great support system to the community”**.

Also, some alumni members occupy strategic positions in society and possess a rich wealth of knowledge. They could provide opportunities for mentorship and leadership development to young Cameroonians in domains that can enable them effectively to contribute to drive the development agenda of the country.

A respondent further argues that **“community development which often translates to national development in the long run is always limited by the available pool of professionals and capacity building of existing and interested actors. Activities by alumni groups within identified domains will play a very significant role in solving the problem.”**

Through such actions, national development actors will be equipped with the skills set needed to drive their development agenda. Moreso, through financial support by alumni groups to such causes, national development actors can have resources to rely on to determine their development trajectory without depending on Western funders. This gives national development actors the overriding say over the affairs they run, hence, further reinforcing that with alumni giving, the phenomenon of white saviourism will be more of a myth than a reality in contexts where alumni giving thrives among other philanthropic endeavours.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This study establishes a strong linkage between alumni giving and philanthropy, affirming that, alumni giving is an arm of philanthropy. As Rory Brooks asserts,

“Philanthropy is an outstanding way to reconnect with society, with communities at different levels. That provides the degree of satisfaction for the individual and a degree of pride coupled with humility of the fact that you are changing outcomes which would not have been changed without your intervention”.

This holds true particularly for active members of alumni groups who buy into and support the vision and ambitions of the alumni groups they belong to. By doing so, their support contributes to enhancing the wellbeing of members of the group and consolidates the overall solidarity within the group.

It also paves way for an extended contribution to improving on the welfare of members of society be it at a small scale or large scale depending on the extent to which the alumni groups' interventions reach. While small scale value-add initiatives can be those implemented specifically to benefit the alma mater, or individuals in and/or from the alma mater, or a small group of persons; large scale initiatives rolled out by alumni groups benefit a significantly huge number of beneficiaries. The latter can be beneficial to the nation.

Such contributions, whether of small scale or large scale, contribute to national development. This study affirms that alumni giving can contribute to national development, driven by citizens of the country, hence, locally-led development.

Recognising the above, it is important to note that such developmental efforts engineered by alumni group members to the benefit of the nation go a long way to demonstrate that it is possible for local actors to take control of and define pathways for their growth and development. Hence, leveraging this experience and practice can inspire actors in Cameroon and countries in the global South to take control of their development trajectory and wield the needed power to realise such. From this study, it therefore becomes evident that alumni giving can make significant strides towards promoting shift the power to local actors.

It can therefore be concluded that alumni giving can contribute to shift the power and promote locally-led development in Cameroon. This therefore gives room for diverse stakeholders to consider innovative ways of leveraging alumni giving opportunities to promote the shift the power agenda and ensure that it contributes to locally-led development in Cameroon.



Image by Shameer Pk from Pixabay

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The significant contribution of alumni groups to external initiatives that benefit their community and nation at large makes these groups a valuable, yet underutilised resource. Partnering with these alumni groups enables development partners to tap into valuable resources and leverage their expertise and support to effectively achieve interventions, programmes or project outcomes and the desired impact. Creating new partnerships and making institutional reforms that provide existing alumni groups windows to improve their knowledge, access additional resources and sharpen and acquire new skills through training programmes and funding will help them to achieve their goals while also supporting the broader development goals of Cameroon.

Closely linked to the above, critical actors within the not-for-profit sector need to tap into alumni giving opportunities. Given that they are deeply involved in, have a role to play in the shift the power engagements and equally play a pivotal role in contributing to locally-led development, it is important for them to explore existing avenues to collaborate with alumni groups and tap into the pool of resources – material, financial, expertise, among others within the alumni groups.

Transparency and accountability by alumni groups are core practices that can foster the active participation of more members who would have been actively contributing to the causes championed

by alumni groups. It is therefore vital for leadership of alumni groups to take this into account and put in place systems that make them more transparent and accountable to members of the group.

It is important for alumni groups to take stock of their non-monetary assets and valorise this to champion causes that contribute to national development. As the study reveals, resources such as the expertise of members of alumni groups stand out as valuable resources that have the potential of shaping national development. Leveraging such to promote causes championed by alumni groups can attract more participation of members while potentially scaling up alumni groups' contribution to national development. Alumni groups should document their contributions to national development. They should document evidence of the financial and material resources and be able to quantify expertise and time invested by members to support causes championed by the group. Significant evidence in this regard can significantly contribute to enable development actors to appreciate the extent to which contributions from alumni groups complement contributions from international stakeholders towards addressing some of the social menaces in the country. This can go a long way to boost efforts geared towards shifting power and leveraging homegrown resources to drive community centred development agendas in Cameroon.

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