



APN 2025 ESSAY BOOKLET

**African Media Practitioners
on Philanthropic Practices.**

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Introduction

APN collaborates with Kenya Community Development Foundation, Global Fund for Community Foundation and Wilde Ganzen Foundation to coordinate the implementation of Giving for Change (GfC) program in eight countries – Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique and Uganda in Africa, and Brazil and Palestine. One of the strategic interventions of the GfC program is to influence in-country state and societal actors (government, emerging philanthropists, individual donors) to support the development of community philanthropy by creating favourable conditions to promote the power of local philanthropic giving as a form and driver of social and systems change. This could be achieved by strengthening ownership of development processes and to amplify the voice and action of communities, demanding accountability and respect of human rights from the power holders.

We have found that one of the effective strategies is to influence the public by creating awareness on domestic philanthropic giving and increase trust in CSAs through media campaigns.

We sought to engage journalists by providing them with a platform to deepen their knowledge on community philanthropy. Unlike the conventional approach of inviting journalists to cover events or share press releases, our program takes a systematic approach, recognizing journalists as more than just messengers for organizations. Our aim is to foster meaningful partnerships that empower journalists to effectively showcase the practices of community philanthropy and highlight the transformative power of philanthropic giving through the hashtag #GivingAndPower.

This collection of writing features seven journalists from seven different African countries. The stories cover varying themes including climate justice, digital advocacy, human rights, community resilience as well as public health. They are both appraisal of the gaps left by in-country state and societal actors in facilitating the wellbeing of people and their communities, as well as a celebration of the giving practices that bridge these gaps.



What's on Gambia: “Why Telling the Right Stories About Giving is As Important As Giving Itself”

BY YERO S. BAH



What's On Gambia, widely known as the Grand Bantaba, has evolved from a simple social media page into one of the most influential civic and philanthropic forces in The Gambia. With over 600,000 followers at home and across diaspora communities in Europe, the USA, and beyond, its strength lies in its capacity to transform storytelling into real-world action. It has evolved into a public square, a philanthropic hub, and a watchdog whose influence extends from urban centers to remote villages.

Philanthropy is deeply rooted in Gambian culture, but What's on Gambia has reimagined how generosity is mobilized, structured, and delivered. Central to this transformation is the platform's transparent, story-driven model, which links individual donors, especially those from the diaspora, to urgent community needs. A compelling example is the newly completed borehole for women gardeners in Njau Sawalo, Upper Saloum.

Funded by The Gambia Sisters, a non-profit in the diaspora, this intervention now provides clean water to women whose livelihoods depend entirely on their gardens. A follower of What's on Gambia, Tida Sisawo, praised the effort, thanking the online platform for facilitating "a project that would have been impossible without collective compassion."

The Gambia Sisters in the Diaspora also funded a borehole in Foni Janack, complete with tap installations throughout the village. One of the platform's most significant moments occurred when a U.S. based Gambian donated D333,000 for more boreholes across the provinces. Famara Drammeh, a follower, remarked, "U.S.-based Gambians are very generous, and they don't make noise," referring to the dignity-centered giving practices that did not ask for praise in return. Another follower, Laibo Manneh, underscored the urgency of interventions on water access.

According to UNICEF's 2020 report, although "90% of households have access to safe drinking water and 60% to improved sanitation," the quality of access remains a major concern, as only 31% of households have handwashing facilities, and 73% face Escherichia coli contamination risks. Further development experts remind us that access doesn't necessarily translate to actual connection to water.

Schools also experience significant Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) disparities, with rural institutions lagging despite 89.5% of primary schools meeting national standards. These gaps create an environment where micro-philanthropy, led through grassroots channels, becomes not only supportive but essential.

Moreover, socioeconomic pressures reinforce the need for communit-driven

intervention. The World Bank Group estimated that national poverty reached 53.4% in 2020, equivalent to about 1.1 million Gambians. Rural poverty stands at 76%, compared with 34% in urban areas. Inflation, averaging 11.6% in 2022 with food inflation at 14.5%, further diminishes purchasing power, especially for households that spend 65% percent of their income on food, according to the Gambia Bureau of Statistics, 2020 survey report.

At the governance level, the 2024 Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI), places The Gambia at a score of "around 38" and ranked 96 out of 180 countries, highlighting persistent concerns of public-sector inefficiency. These governance and service-delivery shortcomings help explain why citizens increasingly rely on alternative mechanisms like What's on Gambia. Studies by FSD Africa, TSI Consultancy, and Africa Renewal show that social-media-driven crowdfunding is effective because it works "faster and more directly," enables rapid "viral amplification," and aggregates "micro-gifts" into sizable interventions. Verified photos, videos, and narrative stories of the result of the giving strengthen credibility more quickly than traditional institutional reports.

"We will be as transparent and accountable as possible. No kickbacks," the team assures, beneficiaries, and followers. This openness cultivates donor confidence and ensures that even small contributors feel connected to the outcome of their giving.

What's On Gambia has leveraged this trust-based model through every project it has executed. This community confidence is visible in the platform's fundraising speed. In a recent campaign to repair and drill boreholes and renovate school toilets, over D220,000 was raised in under 48 hours. The platform continuously reminds followers that even small contributions matter: "We encourage every member of the Grand Bantaba to contribute at least D10. Together, our contributions can bring clean water, dignity, and happiness to thousands of schoolchildren across the country." Institutional actors also collaborate with the platform. Africa Relief and Community Development pledged a borehole for Pacharr Lower Basic School. What's On Gambia arranged borehole repairs at Daru Mbayen Lower Basic School and toilet renovations at Tallinding Upper Basic School. To lower costs, they negotiated with private companies such as GACH Global Trading, Jah Oil, and Jimpex, negotiating prices and securing materials. Their interventions expanded to Fatima Senior Secondary School in Bwiam, reinforcing their reach into multiple regions of The Gambia.

Several followers see the potential for even more ambitious citizen-driven development. One, Ousainou Njai, referenced Ethiopia's self-funded Grand

Renaissance Dam, suggesting that Gambians could similarly finance major infrastructure, possibly including a privately funded Banjul-Barra ferry service. Another follower, Abibou Gibba, argued that philanthropy must accompany improved governance, stating, “The teaching sector is really neglected; meanwhile, President Adama Barrow spent millions on media houses to promote his rotten national government agenda.”

Beyond philanthropy, What’s On Gambia has emerged as a civic watchdog. Gambian Researcher Sherrifo Jobarteh notes, “What’s On Gambia has become an essential watchdog, exposing abuse, corruption, marginalisation, and misconduct in both public and private institutions. Its posts have forced rapid action from landlords, employers, and government offices.” One example involved a landlord who ignored complaints about an overflowing septic tank until a video was posted on the platform. He immediately hired a service truck to fix the problem. In another case, a sick father who could not feed his family received D6,000 from donors within hours, Jaiteh said.

The platform frequently supports overlooked frontline workers as well as citizens’ emergencies. Police officers and school principals have received rams during the muslim Festival of Sacrifice (Eid al-Adha, the muslim Festival of Sacrifice), locally called Tobaski. Nursing students have benefited from tuition payments. When two siblings were struck by a car, the platform provided D10,000 for their care. When a young man’s horse, his family’s only source of income, was killed by a vehicle, What’s On Gambia provided a replacement horse and D34,000 additional support. Additionally, disability-focused interventions have included wheelchairs for the physically challenged and maternity support for amputees.

The platform also confronts abuse, marginalization, and systemic inequities. It exposed alleged “modern-day slavery” at Coco Ocean Resort & Spa, where Gambians were reportedly excluded from senior roles. Domestic violence cases have been highlighted, including one involving a woman abandoned by her husband while pregnant; she received over D45,000 in donations. The platform has also addressed institutional negligence and consumer protection issues, including raising awareness about expired goods at Alvihag Supermarket.

It petitioned the National Assembly’s Petitions Committee in 2022 over allegations of corruption at the Gambia Ports Authority, and it played a role in pushing for an investigation into missing cocaine at the Kanifing Magistrate Court, which led to the arrest of a magistrate and other staff.

Followers often describe the platform as a democratic space. One wrote, “What’s On Gambia, The Grand Bantaba is the Government of the People on

Facebook, they do and continue to do what the Government is supposed to be doing." Another added, "The Grand Bantaba is not just a space for information; it is a powerful tool for direct communication between the government and its citizens."

What's On Gambia's influence on education, medical emergencies, rural water supply, economic empowerment, and governance illustrates a broader shift toward citizen-driven nation-building. As one follower stated, "Without the effort of some patriotic citizens, I wonder how Gambians will live." Another said, "You are making an impact, giving hope to the hopeless and jobs to the jobless."

In essence, the Grand Bantaba is crafting a new philanthropic narrative, one grounded in transparency, shared responsibility, and community-driven action. By telling the right stories and mobilizing collective generosity, What's On Gambia demonstrates that ordinary citizens can redefine the boundaries of development and governance.

The platform shows that when storytelling is aligned with accountability and compassion, it becomes a transformative force capable of reshaping a nation.



Philanthropy Steps In as Zambia Fights Cancer With Just Six Oncologists

BY SOKOSI
SILVESTER BANDA



Zambia's fight against cancer remains a matter of life and death for many, with only six oncologists serving more than 20 million people (ATOM, 2025). According to the Zambia Ministry of Health, the country records approximately 15,300 new cancer cases every year, with 9,700 deaths annually. Cervical, prostate, and breast cancer are among the most common types.

In May 2025, the Access to Oncology Medicines (ATOM) Coalition organised a workshop in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, Zambian Cancer Society (ZCS), Cancer Diseases Hospital, Zambia Medicines Regulatory Authority, and other relevant parties. The shortages of cancer doctors, diagnostic equipment, and health facilities that continue to threaten the lives of cancer patients were the central topic of discussion.

According to the Zambia National Cancer Control Programme Strategic Plan of 2022 – 2026, the country only has 6 oncologists because of weak training programmes for oncologists, pathologists, and other related specialists. The plan also revealed that the local programme to train specialists lacks funding, and when doctors qualify, there are only a few posts with low salaries, which discourages many. Of the few young doctors who choose oncology, many eventually leave to work abroad or change specialties.

Cancer survivor Udie Soko expressed concern that patients often travel long distances to seek medical attention, wait prolonged hours in queues, and are sometimes unable to afford the medical costs, causing them to halt treatment. She added that in rural areas, many people die with cancer without even receiving a diagnosis.

In an effort to address these gaps, the Government allocated K626 million for a new nuclear and cancer treatment centre in Ndola Copperbelt Province, and signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with ATOM Coalition to improve access to diagnostics and supply of cancer medicines. But even with all these commitments, the system continues to suffer as screening rates remain low, rural districts still lack treatment centres, and procurement and regulatory blockage delay access to drugs.

Despite these gaps, some individuals and organisations have stepped in to help through philanthropic work, particularly through alleviating the burden of hospital bills or transportation to the Cancer Diseases Hospital (CDH). For the past 14 years, the Zambian Cancer Society, in conjunction with partners, has taken center stage by donating foodstuffs, warm clothing, education materials, and cleaning supplies to young cancer patients during an event known as the Kids Fun Day on 26th June.

Zambia Cancer Society Communications and Administration Manager, Idah Phiri, stressed that the initiative aims to restore a sense of childhood to young patients enduring the disease and its treatment. Ms. Phiri expressed appreciation to partners like Gatbro International Limited for their long-term support and called on other companies to emulate Gatbro's commitment. Gatbro International Zambia's Head of Marketing and Public Relations, Magali Mwila, said their 5-year partnership with the Zambia Cancer Society is not just corporate social responsibility for them, it is "about showing these families that we see them, care for them, and want to support them during these difficult times," she said.

Caregiver Agness Sakala, whose 3-year-old daughter has stayed in the hospital for 4 months, expressed gratitude for the donation, stressing that it came at the right time when many are struggling with finances. Hospital Communications Manager Jessica Mwanza confirmed that the initiative has impacted 60 families affected by cancer this year.

Another organisation supporting the initiative is Kayula Childhood Cancer Foundation. Executive Director Kalizya Zimba Kayula explained that their organisation operates as a "Home Away From Home," a transit home for children undergoing cancer treatment where guardians are allowed too.

"We operate as a home away from home for young cancer patients and their caregivers," Mrs. Kayula said. "This initiative aims to prevent parents from abandoning their children's treatment due to the financial burden of traveling back and forth between home and the hospital for chemotherapy and radiotherapy sessions."

She disclosed that the current rented facility in Kamwala hosts up to 12 children and 12 parents at a time, but the foundation is completing a custom-built building near the Cancer Diseases Hospital at a total cost of K7 Million (approximately USD280 000) that will accommodate up to 40 children and 40 parents at a time.

Mrs. Zimba added, "We're the only institution that actually provides accommodation to suffering children, even though there are quite many organisations that do cancer care..." She urged organisations and individuals to support the project to ensure children complete treatment without any interruptions.

Philanthropist Remmy Kangwa has been supportive of vulnerable Zambians including cancer patients, relying heavily on the generosity of his Facebook followers rather than any support from the government or donors. Through him, many Zambians have found hope while battling illness, hunger,

and personal challenges. Mr. Kangwa, a Lusaka-based entrepreneur, revealed that he started his humanitarian work six years ago, and he has assisted dozens of individuals facing critical needs, such as urgent medical care, families in need of food, and other challenges.

"If I say that I'm receiving help from the government or donors, I would be lying," he starts before adding, "everything I do comes from the people who believe in me on social media, and they have been my foundation from day one."

He admitted that there is a growing number of people reaching out for help, where his personal resources remain limited. "I wish I could help everyone, but it's just not possible, and it's one of the hardest parts of this work."

Even as the doors have opened for collaboration with stakeholders and partners, as shown in its MoU with the ATOM Coalition, structural and regulatory barriers continue to hinder efforts. High registration fees for oncology medicines and lengthy procurement processes have suppressed the timely involvement of NGO's and philanthropists.

One of the hundreds of patients helped through these efforts is Mary Zulu, a 42-year-old mother from Chongwe district of Lusaka Province who was diagnosed with cervical cancer in 2023. Mary revealed she had lost all hope until well-wishers, through Mr. Kangwa, raised funds to support her transport and medication. Mary, holding back tears, "Without that help, I would have died at home." "I never knew it was cancer until one nurse advised me to go for tests at the cancer hospital."

Another cancer survivor, Queen Tukombe, who was diagnosed with leukemia at the age of six, underwent treatment at the Cancer Diseases Hospital in the Zambian capital, Lusaka. Her parents struggled to afford repeated trips from their rural home to the hospital, but she received support from the Kayula Childhood Cancer Foundation, which kept her at their home, and well-wishers who contributed funds to help her complete her chemotherapy.

She shared with this reporter that the kindness of strangers gave her the strength to keep fighting. "There were days I thought I would not make it, but health personnel and the people who supported my family reminded me that I was not alone," she recalls emotionally.

Now and in her early twenties, Queen volunteers at the Cancer Hospital in Lusaka with the same foundation that once sheltered her and her mother. She visits young patients to encourage them and sensitize the importance

of adhering to medications. "Today, I want to give back that same hope to another child. I survived because someone cared for me."

The success of events like Kids Fun Day underscores the critical role of corporate support, and individual philanthropists such as Remmy Kangwa highlight the significance of the vital support to families unable to cover hospital bills, food, and transport.

While corporate initiatives reach more patients at once, Kangwa's work often targets urgent individual needs, bridging gaps where both formal health systems and community programmes fall short.

Over the years, many journalists in the country have taken a hands-on role in connecting vulnerable individuals with help through their daily reporting. Among them is this reporter, who has worked with Mr. Kangwa and other philanthropists, both local and international, to highlight and link people in urgent need to potential funders. Such collaborations have bridged the gap where formal aid systems fall short, bringing relief to families facing critical problems.

On the shortage of specialists, Zambia Medical Association (ZMA) President Dr. Kaumba Roy Tolopu emphasized the urgent need for Zambia to attract more specialists in fields such as oncology, radiology, anesthesiology, and neurosurgery. He warned that, until these gaps are addressed, philanthropic efforts, like those led by Remmy Kangwa and others, will continue to play a crucial role in providing life-saving support to patients who cannot access or afford specialized services.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health Permanent Secretary for Technical Services, Dr. Kennedy Lishimpi, said that as they recruit health workers this year, they will consider recruiting more oncologists also to alleviate the burden.

As Zambia continues to face a severe shortage of oncologists, drugs, and limited cancer treatment facilities, the combined efforts of corporate partners, journalists, and individual philanthropists are providing vital lifelines for patients and families in need.

Initiatives like these are already demonstrating how community-driven action can complement formal health services, offering both hope and critical assistance. These collaborations remain essential as the government works to expand specialist capacity.

In a country with immense healthcare gaps, compassion, solidarity, and proactive giving can truly be the difference between life and death.



“We Start With What We Have”: Grassroots Recycling and Energy Justice in Thubelihle

BY TULANI NGWENYA



Patricia Thwala is leading a quiet revolution in Thubelihle, Kriel, where coal-fired power stations dominate the skyline, but homes remain energy-poor. As founder of JP Nation Recycling Project NPC, a grassroots resistance initiative against extractive industries and municipal neglect, Thwala rallies youth and volunteers to reclaim toxic spaces through recycling, clean-ups, and climate justice awareness drives. No land. No funding. No formal support; just grit, solidarity, and a refusal to be erased by displacement, pollution, and neglect.

Faced with toxic air, dumped waste, and chronic health issues, Thwala's team collects plastic bottles, cans, scrap metal, glass, and paper, turning recyclable collection into a modest source of income that has created part-time work for several local youth while restoring dignity to polluted spaces.

Yet despite operating in the shadow of mines like Dorsfontein West, the project receives no support from the extractive industry or the government. Instead, it draws strength from community collectives that offer moral solidarity even when material resources are scarce.

Thwala's story questions dominant narratives about philanthropy and development. Who gets seen, funded, and supported in South Africa's energy transition? And what does justice look like for communities living next to the very infrastructure that powers the nation but harms them?

Thubelihle, like many coal-adjacent communities in Mpumalanga, is caught in a paradox: proximity to energy infrastructure that does not guarantee access, safety, or dignity. "The biggest issue is air pollution from the mines, trucks, and power stations," says Thwala. "It causes coughing, chest pains, and breathing problems, especially for children and the elderly." Waste pollution compounds the crisis, with dumped rubbish attracting mosquitoes and creating hazardous living conditions.

Despite these challenges, JP Nation Recycling Project NPC has become a beacon of community-led resilience and has hopes for expansion. "Our dream is to have proper land and equipment to expand and formalise the project." But formal recognition remains elusive. The municipality has not responded to requests for land or tools. "We are doing this with very limited resources, even though we are helping to clean the same community the municipality is responsible for," Thwala notes.

Mining companies like Dorsfontein West Mine, operating nearby, have allegedly failed to engage. "They operate in our area, but they don't give back to the community; our efforts are without infrastructure or institutional backing," claims Thwala.

South Africa's mining law, through the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act, obliges companies to file Social and Labour Plans (SLPs) for local development. In practice, enforcement is weak, accountability is minimal, and many firms reduce SLPs to a compliance exercise rather than a binding social contract.

The absence of a broader corporate social responsibility law that mandates consistent and enforceable community investment leaves grassroots initiatives like JP Nation Recycling Project NPC in a policy vacuum. Without land, funding, or recognition, their work depends entirely on informal networks. This is how communities are sidelined in South Africa's energy transition.

Mpumalanga's coal belt hosts 12 of South Africa's 15 coal-fired power stations, yet Thubelihle remains energy-poor and environmentally burdened. Many households still rely on coal stoves, paraffin, and wood fires for cooking and heating. Eskom's Air Quality Offset Project has only recently begun reaching the area, aiming to shift households to electricity and liquefied petroleum gas. In Ezamokuhle, 91% of homes have already been upgraded with insulation and clean energy alternatives, but Thubelihle is still waiting for a full rollout.

This lack of reliable access to modern energy underscores the paradox: proximity to national energy infrastructure does not guarantee local benefit. According to the World Bank, in 2023, South Africa reported over 90% electrification coverage, yet coal-adjacent settlements like Thubelihle experience frequent outages, unaffordable tariffs, and dependence on polluting fuels.

The health burden compounds the energy poverty. According to the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC), residents living near coal-fired power stations face a 6% higher risk of respiratory illness and premature death compared to those in districts without such infrastructure. Children under five are especially vulnerable, with elevated rates of asthma and bronchitis. "Analysis of air quality data from the South African Air Quality Information System, alongside health statistics from Statistics South Africa and the National Department of Health, reinforces the link between air pollution and health impacts. The study confirms that air pollution increases hospital visits, especially for respiratory diseases like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and tuberculosis," stated Caradee Wright, Chief Specialist Scientist leading the Climate Change and Health Research Programme.

In areas like Kriel, just 10 kilometers south of Thubelihle, and Delmas, roughly

40 kilometers to the west, ambient air quality frequently exceeds World Health Organization safety thresholds, compounding chronic health conditions.

Recent research published in Voluntas confirms that over 60% of community support in Southern Africa flows through informal networks, yet these efforts receive less than 10% of formal philanthropic funding nationally.

Residents like Patricia Thwala and others across Thubelihle are not just enduring pollution; they are actively naming its sources and demanding accountability. "Why must our people always be on the losing side in our own country?" asked one Emalahleni resident during a recent community dialogue, not with despair, but with clarity.

The SAMRC's findings on elevated respiratory risks near coal-fired power stations are echoed in daily life: coughing fits, clinic queues, and children gasping through the school day. Another resident, Nomfundo Masombuka, said, "We have a lot of illegal dumpsites, which means there's no proper infrastructure to manage waste."

Yet hope glimmers in reclamation: volunteer waste pickers, transforming dumpsites with dignity through informal networks striving to counter power. In Thubelihle, a model of "Many to One" giving emerges, informal, collective, and strategic. Youth groups, churches, and burial societies provide manpower and moral support, pooling small amounts through fundraisers to cover basics like gloves, refuse bags, and transport. These modest, irregular contributions, often just a few thousand rand, sustain the initiative without formal funding. "They may not have much," says Thwala, "but they support us with their time and encouragement."

This form of community philanthropy rejects top-down development. It is not about waiting for aid but mobilising what exists. "We don't wait for help; we start with what we have," Thwala asserts. Yet visibility and institutional support remain scarce. "Institutional philanthropy often misses hyperlocal efforts and overlooks grassroots groups already taking action."

Thwala's vision of energy justice is rooted in fairness and reciprocity. "People who live next to coal and power stations should also enjoy clean air, clean water, and opportunities, not just pollution," she says. "Accountability means making sure the mines follow environmental laws and invest back into the communities they affect."

Her call echoes broader demands across Mpumalanga's coal belt, where

communities are demanding not just relief but recognition. Initiatives like Thwala's foreground how local acts of giving are reshaping the struggle for accountability, dignity, and human rights.

Patricia Thwala's story isn't an outlier; it's the new pattern. Across Mpumalanga's coal belt, communities are stitching together their own infrastructures of care. Similar initiatives include the Middelburg Social and Environmental Justice Alliance (MSEJA), which runs transition and environmental health literacy workshops, and community-led campaigns documented in Healing Coal's Long Shadow that highlight grassroots health and justice responses in towns like Carolina and Ermelo.

In Thubelihle, giving is not transactional; it is political. It confronts the asymmetries of power that allow mining companies to extract without reinvesting and municipalities to neglect, while communities self-organise. "Meaningful support means giving us land, equipment, and partnership opportunities," says Thwala. "It means fairness, where the industries that profit from our area also invest in our community's health, jobs, and environment."

For funders, policymakers, and the media, the challenge is clear: to recognise, resource, and respect the work already being done by communities like Thubelihle. This means shifting from charity to justice, from visibility to voice, and from extractive storytelling to co-created narratives that center those most affected.

South Africa's energy transition is not just about cutting coal; it's about power, equity, and survival. Coal still generates 80% of electricity, with Mpumalanga hosting most of the plants. Yet communities like Thubelihle remain energy-poor, relying on coal stoves and paraffin while breathing toxic air.

The government's Just Energy Transition Investment Plan (JET-IP), backed by \$8.5 billion in international finance, promises renewables and new jobs. But rollout is slow, and critics warn the transition risks repeating extractive models that exclude frontline communities. National electrification exceeds 90%, yet coal-belt towns endure outages, unaffordable tariffs, and dependence on dirty fuels.

Patricia Thwala's words cut through the policy jargon: "We start with what we have. But we deserve more than survival; we deserve justice."



From Roots to Resilience: A Rural Association Fighting Climate Change in Busia

**BY EUPHRESIA A.
OKWAKORI**



In Masendebale village, nestled in the remote areas of Busia County, Kenya, a quiet revolution is taking root. A revolution in good management practices to make efficient and sustainable use of water resources and promote catchment conservation measures to improve water quantities and quality. Key to this is the Lunabo Water Resources Users Association (Lunabo WRUA), comprising water users, riparian landowners, and other stakeholders who have formally and voluntarily associated for the purposes of sharing, managing, and conserving common water resources in the Lower Nzoia basin.

Every morning, members of Lunabo gather around tree nurseries that hum with life. Rows of bamboo shoots and indigenous saplings sway gently in the morning breeze, attended to by hands that reflect hope.

Here, philanthropy doesn't arrive in trucks, nor does it trickle down through big grants or outside donors. It begins with the people themselves; neighbors helping neighbors, bound by the belief that caring for the land is also caring for one another.

"We realized that we couldn't wait for help to come from outside," says Rosemary Achieng, one of the founding members, her voice steady but warm. "Our land, our water, our trees, these are our treasures. If we take care of them, they take care of us."

Redefining Philanthropy

Across Africa, philanthropy has long been viewed through an external lens—defined by foreign aid, donor funds, and international interventions. Yet beneath the surface, a more organic form of giving thrives, shaped by African values like Ubuntu (I am because we are), Harambee (pulling together), and Ujamaa (cooperative economics).

This philosophy of homegrown giving lies at the heart of Lunabo WRUA's work. The association, which brings together over 280 active members—farmers, women, youth, and artisans—embodies what community-led philanthropy looks like in action.

Supported by the National Government through the Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI), Lunabo members received essential capacity building on the establishment and management of a tree nursery through a donation of 18 kg of various tree seedlings. Lunabo members say that through this initiative, they now boast of three tree nurseries with over 1000 species that enhance catchment conservation efforts. So far, the WRUA has restored and conserved 9kms of both Lunabo and Masogo Rivers.

With more support from Kenya Water Towers, GiZ, and the Western Kenya Water Project, Lunabo WRUA focuses on locally driven climate adaptation and mitigation strategies. Their approach is simple yet transformative: equip communities with the skills and tools to restore their environment, improve livelihoods, and build resilience, one project at a time.

“Philanthropy here is not about money,” explains Winbold Wangombe, the association’s chairperson. “It’s about people coming together, each contributing what they have— skills, time, or labor— to make life better for everyone.”

In a county characterized by increased temperature variability throughout the year (average high temperatures of 28°C) and significant annual rainfall of 1525MM, Busia has become prone to climate change impacts, including floods, prolonged dry spells, erratic rainfall, changes in farming seasons, landslides, and lightning.

Having witnessed some of these natural calamities, Lunabo WRUA has emerged as a living example of what happens when a community refuses to be a victim of climate change—and instead becomes its own solution.

With the knowledge gained on climate change, Lunabo RWUA continues to emphasize the importance of integrating climate-smart practices in community projects to ensure environmental sustainability and improved livelihoods.

Greening Livelihoods, Protecting Ecosystems

The group’s tree nurseries, now boasting more than 1,000 seedlings of indigenous and conservation species—including bamboo—have become a symbol of renewal. They supply seedlings to members to plant for soil and water conservation and erosion control while restoring degraded land and building climate resilience.

Bamboo, in particular, has become the community’s “green gold.” Beyond its environmental value, it’s also a source of income as an alternative to charcoal and firewood, thereby reducing dependency on traditional wood fuel. Lunabo WRUA has successfully established over 330 acres of bamboo, with more than 80 acres of mature bamboo.

To enhance sustainability, the association has ventured into bamboo value addition by fabricating pillow case bamboo briquettes at the National Government, Butula Enterprise Development Center. The briquettes are produced through a process known as carbonization, which transforms harvested bamboo into high-quality fuel.

According to the livelihood committee chairperson, Bravin Wesonga, cassava flour is the most efficient and clean-burning binder for making the briquette, and therefore members are encouraged to integrate cassava cultivation into their bamboo farming systems to ensure a steady supply, whilst contributing to food security.

But with a production capacity of 1.5 tons per day, the association lacks a specialized dryer, which limits daily production and the WRUA's ability to meet growing demand from the local hotel industry, institutions, and households who appreciate the efficiency, affordability, and environmental benefits of bamboo briquettes.

Water, Bees, and A Circular Economy

In Busia, water is both a lifeline and a challenge. Frequent, prolonged droughts and flash floods have disrupted farming patterns and livelihoods. To tackle this, Lunabo WRUA constructed a multi-purpose fish pond designed to capture surface runoff during rainy seasons.

The pond has become a model of a circular water economy: it supports aquaculture, provides irrigation water for the nursery during dry spells, and prevents downstream flooding. The soil excavated from the pond is used for brick-making, creating yet another income stream for members.

"Nothing here goes to waste," says Wangombe, one of the beekeepers, with a smile. "That's our philosophy: use what you have wisely, and nature will give back."

Nearby, a small apiary buzzes with life. The association manages 50 beehives, tended by trained beekeepers. The honey is sold locally, while bees play a critical role in pollinating trees and crops—boosting yields and biodiversity in the surrounding farms. "When we first started beekeeping, it was just for honey," Wangombe recalls. "But soon we realized how important bees are for our plants and for the environment. Now, when we see bees around our farms, we see hope."

Women at The Heart of Transformation

Women stand at the core of Lunabo WRUA's transformation story. Many have adopted energy-saving stoves, both permanent and portable, which have reduced household firewood use by nearly half. Beyond their environmental benefits, these stoves have changed the social dynamics of over 600 households in unexpected ways.

"Before, I spent hours looking for firewood," says Grace Khamala, a mother



of four. “Now with the improved stove, I use less wood and have more time for my children and my garden.” Grace laughs as she shows off her newly built kitchen. “The stove has added beauty to our home—and even spiced up our marriage!” she says with a broad grin. “Because the kitchen is now clean and smoke-free, my husband often joins me there. We cook together and talk about our day.”

For Millicent Karani, who owns two permanently built rocket stoves, the change has been nothing short of life-altering. “I used to suffer from coughing and chest pains because of the smoke,” she says. “Now I breathe clean air, and my health has improved. The stove has given me back my strength.”

These small yet powerful shifts—more time for families, improved health, reduced deforestation—are rippling across Masendebale, reshaping daily life and reinforcing the community’s commitment to environmental and health stewardship.

Beyond Projects: A Philosophy of Giving

What makes Lunabo WRUA remarkable isn’t just the projects—it’s the philosophy that binds them. Each initiative is a collective effort, powered by voluntary labor, local knowledge, and shared purpose. Members contribute seedlings, tools, or time, and others offer their expertise. The association itself runs on a spirit of Harambee, a call to “pull together” that has defined Kenyan communal life for generations.

“We may not have much money,” says Khamala. “But we have each other.”

When we work together, we can solve our own problems.”

This sense of ownership has not only sustained the group but also strengthened its credibility. When external partners like GiZ or the Western Kenya Water Project provide support, it builds on an existing foundation of trust and initiative, not dependency.

“External partners walk with us; they don’t lead us,” Wangombe emphasizes. “They see that we already have the will. What they bring are skills and connections. But the heartbeat of Lunabo WRUA is our people.”

Building Resilience, One Community at a Time

Busia County government has recognized Lunabo WRUA as a model for climate-smart community action, inspiring neighboring villages to adopt similar approaches. The group now organizes exchange visits for other water resource associations, sharing their experiences in bamboo farming, beekeeping, and energy conservation.

“When people visit and see what we’ve done, they realize it’s possible to change things,” says Achieng. “It gives them courage to start their own projects.”

Their efforts align with Kenya’s broader push for community-led adaptation, where local knowledge and participation form the backbone of climate resilience strategies.

Experts in the philanthropy space say this approach reflects a broader shift in Africa—from dependency on external aid toward self-determined, community-driven development.

As Dr. Bhengkosi Moyo, a leading voice on African philanthropy, once noted, “True African giving is not charity—it’s solidarity.” Lunabo WRUA embodies that spirit fully.

Investing in The Future

As Kenya and the wider continent grapple with the growing impacts of climate change, Lunabo WRUA’s story offers valuable lessons. It shows that sustainable change doesn’t always depend on large-scale funding—it can emerge from within, fueled by shared values and local ingenuity.

By blending traditional cooperation with modern sustainability practices, Lunabo WRUA is not only protecting its environment but also reshaping the

story of African philanthropy. It demonstrates that philanthropy can be as simple—and as powerful—as a group of villagers pooling their energy to plant trees, build stoves, and care for their land.

In Masendebale, hope now grows leaf by leaf, hive by hive, brick by brick. Each seedling planted, each stove built, each beehive buzzing tells a story of a people reclaiming their power—proving that the most enduring change begins not from the top down, but from the roots up.



The Fasher Kitchen: Cooking Hope Amidst the Siege

BY ALBASHIR DAHAB



In Sudan's Darfur region, the city of El Fasher once lived an ordinary life, far from the war raging in Khartoum. In its bustling market, the voices of vendors mingled with the scent of spices, and schoolchildren's songs filled the air with the promise of the future. People carried on with resilience and faith. Until the city suddenly turned into a frontline. The question changed from "What's the price today?" to "Who is still alive?"

Since the outbreak of the armed conflict in Sudan on April 15th, 2023, state institutions have collapsed, and humanitarian agencies have withdrawn. Yet, the Sudanese spirit of solidarity did not break. When the official structures disappeared, neighbours became the first line of humanitarian defence. Where the state went silent, it was the people's hands that spoke through acts of compassion.

What is happening in Sudan today goes beyond traditional "aid." It redefines charity as a communal act born from necessity, from awareness, from the collective conviction that saving lives does not need permission.

In such a reality, the neighbour becomes the rescuer, and daily participation turns into a form of civil resistance.

The Story of the El-Fasher Kitchen

In North Darfur, on the edge of the Sahara, El-Fasher stands as witness to one of Sudan's most complex humanitarian crises. In April 2024, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) laid siege to the city after several local armed factions joined the Sudanese Army under the banner of the Joint Forces. El-Fasher became almost completely encircled and endured relentless battles until the RSF finally took control on October 26, 2025.

Yet amid fear and fire, the Fasher Kitchen emerged. What began as a small pot simmering over a fearful fire, surrounded by women baking patience into every meal, soon turned into a symbol of civilian resistance, a bridge between hunger and hope. While bombs fell outside, the women inside rebuilt life through cooking and care, a rare glimpse of grassroots resilience in modern Sudan.

Founded in response to the humanitarian catastrophe facing El-Fasher and surrounding areas that saw an influx of displaced families from Zamzam Refugee Camp, the initiative sought to provide immediate food and water aid to the most vulnerable: the elderly, children, and women without income or shelter.

The kitchen was launched by volunteer Mohyeddin Shougar, alongside a group of young men and women. One of its first female volunteers recalls,

“We didn’t know what to do, but when we saw the hungry children, we decided to do what we know how to cook.”

According to UNICEF reports (2005), more than 260,000 civilians, half of them children, remain trapped inside El-Fasher with limited access to food, medicine, and education. The statistic makes the kitchen and the women leading the initiative one of Sudan’s most important civil society efforts during the war.

The People’s Economy of Solidarity

The Fasher Kitchen operates on one simple but profound belief: “A meal is never eaten alone.”

Whoever has something shares it. Flour, time, firewood, or even a single pot. From this philosophy emerged what can be called an “economy of popular solidarity,” a self-organised humanitarian network based on trust, not bureaucracy.

In the absence of major organisations, the kitchen became a “miniature government,” as one local committee member described it, “people came for food, for comfort, for conversation and for the feeling that someone still cares.”

By May 2024, local estimates indicated the kitchen was feeding around 4000 families weekly, mostly displaced people, elders, and children. Volunteers often risked their lives to deliver meals to people living along dangerous streets just to keep others alive.

Over time, the idea spread beyond El-Fasher. Women in Nyala, Madani, and Geneina started similar community kitchens using whatever little resources they had. Thus, a national culture of “Takiya” transforms charity from a local initiative to collective consciousness salvation as a shared duty.

Food as Identity and Resistance

In Sudanese culture, food is more than a sustenance; it is identity and connection. Sharing a meal is both a greeting and a declaration of kinship. Hospitality and generosity are symbols of dignity, and when starvation becomes a weapon of war, cooking itself becomes an act of symbolic defiance.

Through their pots and flatbread, the women of El-Fasher redefined power, not with rifles or politics, but with spoons and courage.

The Kitchen became more than a food centre; it turned into a safe space

where women shared laughter, stories, and tears. It became a community within a besieged city, and its daily fire symbolized that El-Fasher was still alive.

Children who lost their schools came to help carry pots and serve meals, “learning” through action, that dignity is something that can be preserved through serving and sharing.

Sociologically, El-Fasher Kitchen represents a model of community resilience, the ability of a society to adapt to survive through internal solidarity when formal systems collapse.

The story of The Fasher Kitchen continues a long lineage of Sudanese women’s civic leadership from “Nafeer,” an old Sudanese tradition that signifies collective solidarity with those in need. This is especially during the planting and harvest seasons and during floods, traditions to modern peace movements.

Historically, women organised “Zareeba” campaigns during the Mahdist era to collect food for fighters and refugees. Today, in war-torn Darfur, they revive this heritage, proving that charity in Sudan is not a borrowed model, but an indigenous practice.

Between Survival and Memory

After the RSF took control of El-Fasher on 26 October 2025, the kitchen was forced to stop operations following the death of several volunteers and displaced participants. But its spirit endures.

Even in displacement camps in Tawila, 68 km west of El-Fasher, Nyala, the capital of South Darfur State, and Al-Dabba, which lies in the Northern State about 900 km from El-Fasher, a harsh desert journey that displaced families take northward in search of safety. Women who once worked in the kitchen have started new mini kitchens, keeping that flame alive. One of them said, “It doesn’t matter where we are, what matters is that we keep helping [because] food is life.”

El-Fasher kitchen stands as a symbol of civil resistance and humanitarian action in wartime Sudan.

It reminds Africa that real philanthropy begins with people for people, not in boardrooms or aid budgets. The future of Sudan will not only be rebuilt by politicians, but by those who choose life amidst ruin, believing that a kind word and a shared meal are mightier than war.

In El-Fasher, optimism may be scarce, but willpower endures. The will to live, to rebuild, to cook hope from ashes.

As its fire once lit Darfur, it may not inspire others across the continent to see charity as a distinctly African act of liberation and humanity.

Their stories may never appear in history books, but they remain the living proof that, in Africa, giving is not charity; it is a way of survival.



Reviving Zimbabwe's Traditional Grains: Can Philanthropy Make a Difference?

**BY ANDREW
MAMBONDIYANI**



“Farming should not be boring.” That’s the mantra of one traditional leader from eastern Zimbabwe.

Blessing Zimunya, a traditional leader in Nyamana Village, Mutare District, is using drama to make farming knowledge engaging and relevant, especially for the younger generation. Nyamana Village is a drought-prone small farming enclave about 50 kilometres south of Zimbabwe’s eastern border city of Mutare. Zimunya’s efforts focus on promoting drought-tolerant crops like pearl millet (mhunga), sorghum (mapfunde), and finger millet (rukweza or zviyo), which are more resilient to changing weather patterns.

“We are currently working on a drama focusing on various aspects of climate change. We have realised that the adoption of traditional or small grains like finger millet, pearl millet, or sorghum will help small-scale farmers fight climate change-induced droughts. These crops are drought-resistant,” said Zimunya, who is also a thriving small-scale beekeeper and crop farmer

Known in the area for his charming smile and uproarious laughter, Zimunya is using drama to target the young generation to embrace small grains. “Our children are no longer interested in eating food made from millets or sorghum. They say the food is not tasty. Yet, these small grains are more nutritious than maize, which they’re used to. We are teaching them through our drama. Drama is a powerful tool to send a message,” he said.

Zimunya leverages his acting skills, which he honed during his days at school, to engage his community. He has found that drama is an effective way to drive action on social issues, including climate change. Zimunya’s approach, he says, is rooted in his personal experience as an actor, as he has seen firsthand how drama can inspire meaningful change. By harnessing this powerful tool, he can convey important messages about climate change and encourage his community to act. Drama, Zimunya said, helps him to connect with his community and inspire action.

“As a traditional leader, I want to lead by example. I want people to learn from what I do,” he adds.

Leonard Madanhire, a farmer at Village I in Mutare District, mixes farming with adventure. He explores and forages in the Gutaurare, Njeza, Gombai, and Madzimbahwe mountains near his village, where their forefathers used to stash grain in case of a raid during wars.

“I have explored caves where they [forefathers] used to hide their grain in times of war. I have seen some caves that still have remnants of finger

millet. I have learned how our forefathers stored their grain in large clay pot-like containers. This shows that the most common crops during that time were small grains. We need to retrace our steps and grow those crops that are both drought-resistant and nutritious," Madanhire said.

Madanhire becomes animated as he narrates his adventures in the mountains; adventures that he says will help to restore his area's traditional grains. He showed me videos of some of his escapades and even offered to take me to one of the mountains.

"I'm sharing these stories with other farmers; they should know which crops are good for our area and how best we can restore and increase production of these crops. For us to address the current droughts, we should look at our past. The answer to the present droughts lies in our past," Madanhire said.

But Madanhire, Zimunya, and other advocates of small grains face a difficult task; many farmers are hooked on maize as a staple food. Maize was introduced and aggressively marketed by the colonial government in Zimbabwe, then Rhodesia, in the 1930s. Crops like pearl millet, finger millet, and sorghum increasingly became known as a 'poor man's crop,' according to [Bryan Kauma](#), an expert in African history at Durham University (UK) and a research fellow at Stellenbosch University (South Africa).

Under the colonial regime, white maize fetched higher prices on the market, leaving small grains at an economic disadvantage. With limited land and ever-increasing taxation obligations, growing small grains was no longer viable, forcing many small-scale farmers to abandon their traditional grains.

Smallholder farmers are now paying the price the hard way. Recurring droughts are wiping out the farmers' rainfed maize crop, leaving millions of people in Zimbabwe without adequate food. The country's by about 1°C since the 1960s, and rainfall has decreased by about 20 percent. The drought frequency has risen from once in ten years to once every 3 years. Yet, more than 70 percent of the country's population still depends on agricultural-related economic activities. In 2024, an El Niño-induced drought, the worst in over 40 years, ravaged Zimbabwe, leaving more than 6 million people food insecure. Millions of livestock died too as a result of the drought. In some parts of Zimbabwe, many small-scale farmers have abandoned their farms, and their land has now been taken over by thorny shrubs.

The hunt for and multiplication of drought-resistant crops in Zimbabwe has never been as urgent as it is today. Unfortunately, many small-scale farmers are still reluctant to fully embrace traditional grains as their staple crops.

Maize is easy to process and is versatile, as some farmers argue.

But some elderly farmers still have small grain seeds tucked in the roofs of their small kitchen huts, where the seeds are preserved by smoke and soot. Some farmers, particularly women, in Gutaurare, a farming community in Mutare District, have been sharing their seeds. Their concept is known in their local dialect as “kuromba mbeu,” literally translated as “seed initiation.” If a farmer gets a small amount of seed, they will plant the seed, harvest it, and keep the harvest as seed for the next season. This farmer will repeat the same process until they have enough seed to grow on a larger piece of land or share it with other farmers.

The efforts to revive traditional drought-resistant small grains in Zimbabwe have also received major boosts from philanthropic organisations. Mhakwe Heritage Foundation Trust is one of the philanthropic organisations working with smallholder farmers to promote small grains, such as millets, sorghum, and cowpeas. Mhakwe Heritage Foundation Trust advocates for heritage and culture preservation through research and documentation. Farmers in Mutare District’s Ward 5, Dora, Nyakunu village, and Mutare North constituency, and Ward 18 Betera, Mhereyenyoka Village, and Buhera District and Buhera Central Constituency are benefiting from this initiative.

“These areas are predominantly under [Zimbabwe’s] Region 5, which is characterised by low rainfall. As a result of the effects of climate change, the communities are experiencing acute food shortages, resulting in school dropouts among learners,” said David Mutambirwa, the executive director and founder of Mhakwe Heritage Foundation Trust. “We are training the small-scale farmers in the respective areas in planting small grains to provide household food security.”

Some of the successful farmers, Mutambirwa said, are processing and packaging the products for sale in their communities and cities like Mutare and Rusape, getting income for the families.

And Anna Brazier, an independent climate change researcher based in Zimbabwe, said that though she does not usually work directly with farmers, she sometimes does a bit of training for lead farmers and extension officers. Last year, Brazier was involved with an interesting climate change adaptation project with a local nongovernmental organisation called Partners for Integrated Growth and Development (PIGAD).

“We did participatory research with communities in Hwedza, Murewa, and Buhera [districts]. We had workshops with community representatives, including elders, traditional leaders, youth, farmers, people living with

disabilities, agriculture extension officers, and other government representatives,” Brazier said. During the workshops, she added, they discussed how communities have changed their methods to cope with climate change. Notably, here too, philanthropy actors have noticed an increase in the use of indigenous knowledge methods just as Madanhire and Zimunya are doing within their communities.



How a Journalism Association in Cameroon is Keeping the Legacy of Deceased Colleagues Alive

BY MBOH PROMISE



In a country where journalists often work under precarious conditions, battling poor pay, limited recognition, and growing threats to their safety, solidarity becomes more than a virtue – it becomes survival. This spirit of compassion, unity, and philanthropy is evident in the Cameroon Association of English-Speaking Journalists, CAMASEJ, which honours the legacy of their deceased members by extending a helping hand to their children.

Through a recent back-to-school initiative launched in September, the association disbursed close to two million Francs CFA to support 22 children of 10 deceased journalists across five of its chapters nationwide. Each child received 75,000 FCFA to assist with school fees, books, and other educational needs for the 2025-2026 academic year.

It may not sound like much in economic terms, but for families left behind by men and women who dedicated their lives to informing the public, often with little financial security, it is a grand gesture indeed. It is a message that says: you are not forgotten.

At the heart of this initiative is CAMASEJ National President, Viban Jude, a man whose words reflect a deep understanding of the sacrifices journalists make and the collective duty to honor their legacy.

“One of the missions of our association is solidarity. When a member is sick, arrested, or in distress, we step in. But this time, we decided to go beyond that, by reaching out to the families of our deceased members. These colleagues contributed to the growth of our association, and their families should not be left behind,” Viban explained.

CAMASEJ’s leadership went chapter by chapter, identifying the orphans of their late members through a careful verification process to ensure that every genuine case was covered. The funds were distributed through chapter presidents, ensuring utmost transparency.

Stories of Gratitude

In Bamenda, chief town of the North West Region, three children of the late journalist Manaseh Vubansi, a sharp pen known for his courage and clarity, received support through their aunt and guardian, Gemuh Beltine. Manase passed away in 2023 after a long illness, leaving behind children in the university, lower sixth, and form five.

“The money came at the right time. It’s a relief. The children were very happy when we received the money. I have already paid their school fees. I will keep doing my best to ensure the children stay in school and make the

association and their late father proud.” Gemuh said.

In Yaounde, the capital of Cameroon, the family of the late ace journalist and publisher of Chronicle Newspaper, Mbah Eric Motomu, who used to practice in Bamenda, also benefited. His sister, Sama Edith, received the funds on behalf of his two children. Her voice trembled with emotion as she expressed gratitude to the association.

“Dear brothers and sisters of this noble profession, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to you for stretching your arms to assist the two orphans left behind by the late Chronicle-Motomu. We received the package just when I was seeking divine help. I can testify that God answered my plea through this family,” Sama said.

These are not just donations. They are lifelines, threads of hope connecting the living to the legacy of those who once fought for truth in a difficult media landscape.

The same initiative has been carried out in other chapters of the association in towns like Kumba, Buea, and Douala.

Journalism in Cameroon: Noble Work, Harsh Realities

Cameroon’s media environment, particularly for English-speaking journalists, remains one of the most challenging in Africa. The country ranks low on the World Press Freedom Index, reflecting a climate where reporters face censorship, intimidation, and even violence, especially in the conflict-hit North West and South West regions.

Many journalists who work with private media earn less than 50,000 FCFA (\$80) a month, barely enough to survive, let alone save for emergencies or secure insurance. Few have access to health coverage or pension schemes. When a journalist falls ill or dies, families are often left in despair, forced to rely on goodwill for survival.

In this context, CAMASEJ’s initiative becomes more than charity. As many rightfully said, it becomes an act of resistance. It is a testament that despite the shrinking civic space, the media community can and will look after its own.

“The economy of the media is not the best. You can imagine how difficult it is for the spouses or guardians of these children left behind. So, even in a modest way, we said, let’s support their education. Some might one day grow up to be journalists themselves,” Vibian admitted.

CAMASEJ's gesture reflects a philosophy that has guided the association since its founding in 1992, that journalism, at its core, is a public service rooted in empathy. Over the years, the association has been at the forefront of not just advocating for media rights, but also providing tangible support to its members in distress.

From hospital bills to legal aid, Viban notes that CAMASEJ has consistently stepped in when journalists faced arbitrary arrests or financial hardship. The back-to-school initiative, however, takes that solidarity a step further by reaching beyond the grave to honor the families of those who once served the cause of truth.

"We're not only showing solidarity to members who are still with us. We're extending it to their families because their parents contributed to this profession, to this association. It's our way of extending their legacy." Viban emphasized.

Importantly, CAMASEJ is not treating this initiative as a one-off event. Viban added that the leadership is developing a Relief Fund, a structured, and institutional mechanism that ensures sustainability and continuity, even as leadership changes over time.

"We want to make it institutional. It shouldn't depend on one executive. Even if tomorrow we are no longer here, the system should continue. The project is written out clearly, transparently, and designed to attract support from philanthropists and partners." Viban said.

The National president revealed that the association has already received interest from private donors willing to contribute quietly. For them, the proof of transparency and the visible impact on children's lives serve as motivation to give.

Beyond Money: Mentorship and Legacy

CAMASEJ's vision does not stop at financial aid. Viban spoke passionately about plans to bring the children of deceased journalists together not just to receive support, but to feel part of the extended CAMASEJ family.

"We would like in the future to commune with these kids. Let them meet people they've seen on TV, interact with their parents' friends and colleagues. They are our extended family, and we want them to know that." he said.

This long-term vision highlights that compassion is not only about giving,

but also about belonging. The goal is to ensure these children grow up knowing that their parents' work mattered and that their professional family stands by them.

A Beacon in a Fragile Media Landscape

The gesture comes at a time when Cameroon's media sector is under increasing strain. Journalists face arrests, threats, and intimidation, particularly those reporting on governance or the Anglophone crisis. Several have lost their lives in the line of duty, while others languish in detention.

Yet, amid these hardships, CAMASEJ continues to advocate for professionalism, ethical reporting, and better working conditions. The association has plans to revive the CAMASEJ Awards, an initiative aimed at recognizing journalists who continue to uphold excellence despite the odds. "Sometimes we focus too much on the bad examples. But some journalists are making a real difference. We must hold them up like a torchlight to inspire others and to remind society that journalism still matters," Viban noted.

The back-to-school gesture may appear modest in numbers, but its symbolic weight is profound. In a country where many journalists operate in isolation, where institutional support is scarce, and where the death of a breadwinner can easily plunge a family into despair, this initiative is said to restore faith both in humanity and in the profession itself.

It reminds the public that journalists, too, have families and dreams and that their service deserves dignity, even in death. It also serves as a quiet challenge to other professional associations and public institutions in Cameroon: that solidarity should not end when the cameras are off, or the headlines fade.

