

Lusoma Gazette

MINDSET
MATTERS

Dear Donors

LUSOMA
SPOTLIGHT

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FROM THE EDITOR

Can you believe we're already at the end of the year? How did that happen? Weren't we just setting goals two days ago? That meme about not knowing what happens to the weekends should really apply to the years. Honestly, since 2020, it feels like every two seconds it's Christmas again. And here we are.

Speaking of 2020, so much has changed, right? Yet, at the same time, it feels like nothing has. The pandemic forced us to rethink everything: how we work, how we connect, how we support one another. It reminded us, in the hardest way possible, that our survival often depended less on distant systems and more on what we could do together, right here, at home. In many ways, that moment was a catalyst, a trigger, for communities to take agency back into their own hands.

For too long, the development story has cast communities as recipients: waiting to be saved, funded, or "empowered." Yet agency was never really lost, it was just overlooked. From the aunties who organize fundraisers at church, to youth groups pooling resources for their neighborhoods, to leaders who insist on being more than a line item in someone else's proposal, the evidence is undeniable: power has always been local.

Taking back our agency means naming that truth. It means challenging partnerships that feel more like performances and reimagining them as spaces of solidarity. It means being honest about the difficulties. Yes, donor power imbalances exist, compliance is heavy, and local voices are often muted. However, it also means holding on to hope, because every act of local giving, every community-led solution, every moment of shared accountability is proof that another way is possible.

And maybe, just maybe, if we can laugh a little along the way, at the irony, at the jargon, at ourselves, we can also find the courage to reframe the story. Not of communities waiting for agency to be handed back, but of communities confidently standing in the agency they've had all along.





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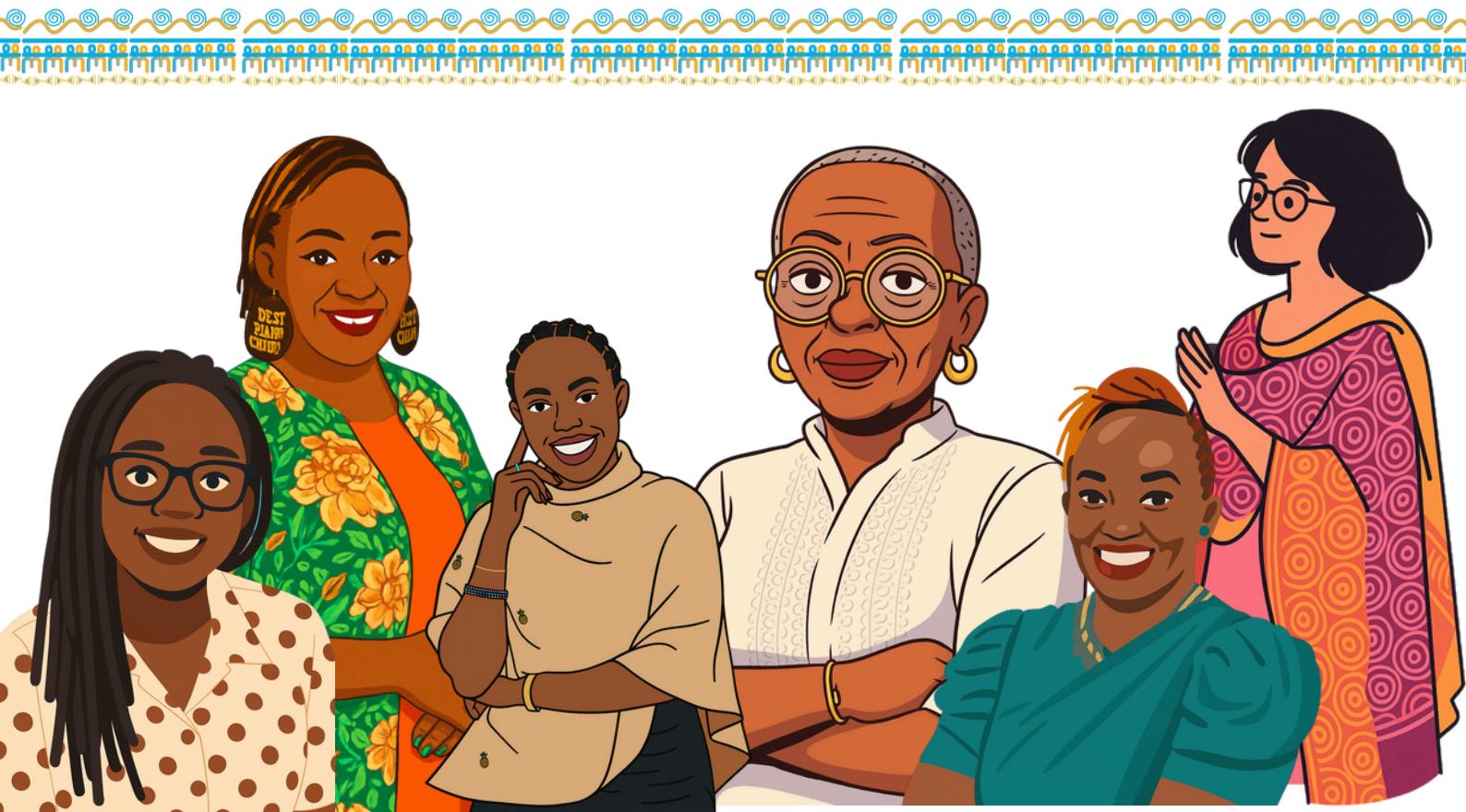
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by Joy Mwende



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With over 25 years of experience in the social impact sector, Manjusha Khedkar has dedicated her career to strengthening communities through local leadership and knowledge. Her work spans capacity building for NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs), legal aid, community mobilization, and skill development training for youth and women from marginalized backgrounds.

Her work embodies the belief that lasting social change begins within communities themselves, when people are equipped with the tools, skills, and confidence to lead their own programs



Rose Maruru

Rose Maruru, the Co-Founder and CEO of EPIC-Africa, through her leadership, [EPIC-Africa](#) champions locally led solutions and amplifies the impact of African philanthropy, ensuring that development across the continent is shaped and driven by local knowledge and leadership.

With over 30 years of experience in civil society, development, and philanthropy, Rose is recognized as a seasoned global development expert and a strong advocate for African-led change.



Africa is the continent with the richest potential and resources in the world. Yet, spend a few minutes with non-profits and social enterprises here, and you'll hear the same refrain: "We don't have enough." Not enough funding. Not enough staff. Not enough resources to keep going.

This is the reality for institutions on the frontlines of poverty, education, health, and community development. However, over time, this focus on what's missing has hardened into something deeper: a scarcity mindset.

In Africa, scarcity shows up in familiar ways: economic systems designed to extract resources outward rather than nurture local growth, decades of donor-driven aid reinforcing the idea that solutions must always come from outside, and wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, while entire communities are left dependent and overlooked.

Here's the danger of staying stuck in scarcity: we stop dreaming big and lose the drive to innovate. We compete instead of collaborate, thinking there's only room for one winner. We focus on today and forget the long-term. Worst of all, we lose talent to other countries because opportunities at home seem too limited.

MINDSET MATTERS



It's survival mode, and survival mode is not where Africa's brilliance belongs.

How do we turn this around? How do we move from scarcity to strength?

The truth is, the rest of the world already sees Africa's potential. The bigger question is: do we? Until we believe in our capacity, we will remain tools for enriching others as opposed to building for ourselves.

The good news is, Africa has everything it needs. Capable minds, constitutions, manifestos, policies, and tools waiting to be implemented. Unfortunately, they won't take root until individuals and communities wake up to their power.

"Survival mode is not where Africa's brilliance belongs."
- Christine Kuria



There's a proverb that says: "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore, get wisdom: and with all your getting, get understanding." That is where the shift must begin - with knowledge.

Take an example of colonization in Africa, where it was not just a weapons strategy. Mindsets were shaped through information; distortion of African identity, silencing voices, and controlled through education or religion. The same tool can work in reverse. Using local knowledge, there is need to reclaim the narrative and chart a path forward.

Kenyan writer Ngũĩ wa Thiong'o once said: "The most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world."

And Nelson Mandela reminded us: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

The battle for Africa's future will be won or lost in the mind. When we change how we see ourselves, from scarce to strong, everything else follows.

WHEN COMMUNITIES LEAD

I have worked in rural Maharashtra, one of the western states of India, for many years. Our organization, Action for Women and Rural Development (AWARD), is based in Satara District, where agriculture is the main source of income. Most of the families we serve are small or marginal farmers who work tirelessly, yet rarely receive fair prices for their crops.

With rising costs, many young men migrate to cities in search of work, often ending up in insecure, low-paying jobs. This leaves women behind to manage both farms and families, usually without extra support. Their labor is essential but rarely recognized. So, we asked ourselves: what would it take to create change that lasts?

It wasn't a lack of awareness or even resources. And it wasn't about waiting for outside experts to bring advanced solutions. What people truly needed was the ability to organize themselves and mobilize what they already had.

That is when our journey with Change the Game Academy (CtGA) began in 2021. With training and coaching support from Smile Foundation, we learned valuable skills in local fundraising. I was fortunate to go a step further and become a certified trainer in both Local Fundraising and Mobilizing Support.

After the training, we organized our first local fundraiser. The money we raised went directly to support Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) and women's groups in our region, partners already doing meaningful work.

In 15 villages, part of the funds supported bamboo craft training for youth and women. They sold baskets and winnowing fans in nearby markets, earned income, and reinvested some of their earnings to buy bamboo rhizomes. This meant they could grow their own bamboo instead of depending on outside sources. A small step toward independence, but a powerful one.

In villages like Maparwadi and Kaloshi, women's CBOs also grew in confidence. They began approaching local officials directly to request better market spaces for selling their homemade ghee, soaps, tooth powders, and oils. With minimal financial support, again raised through local fundraising, they improved their packaging and built relationships with shops in nearby towns.

The best part is that they didn't stop at business. With some savings, they began supporting other community initiatives: organizing a signature drive for open gyms in their village, and promoting products like pickles and chutneys from fellow villagers at their market stalls. We began to see more people getting involved, and more groups taking initiative in different ways.

One of the most meaningful outcomes of the CtGA training has been supporting village-level seed banks. Communities had always saved seeds informally, but our role was to bring more structure and clarity. Using tools from the training, like context analysis and stakeholder mapping, we trained village-level animators who can now confidently engage with local decision makers and government officials to protect and strengthen these seed systems.

My key takeaway from this journey is that local fundraising is not just about collecting money, it is about ownership. When people raise their own resources, whether funds, time, or support, they also raise their sense of agency. They become active participants in shaping the process.

Even after all these years of working with rural communities, I continue to learn that real change does not need to come from outside. It can, and often does, come from within the community, when they are given the right tools. And that is the kind of change worth building.





THE
TIME IS
NOW

“IF NOT NOW,
THEN WHEN?”

“Community philanthropy is not new, it is newly recognized. Its strength lies in promoting local ownership while bringing value to broader development partnerships.”

- Susan Njambi

OWNING THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF LOCAL GIVING

In the shifting landscape of global development, African-led solutions are no longer a luxury, they are a necessity. As donor funding becomes increasingly unpredictable, organizations like [EPIC-Africa](#) are reimagining philanthropy as a homegrown force rooted in data, trust, and community power.

Founded on lived experience within the international development sector, EPIC-Africa emerged from recognizing the dysfunctions that plagued donor-driven models. Too often, a select few with foreign networks or English-speaking elites dominated access to funds, leaving countless grassroots organizations overlooked. This distorted picture of civil society ignored the vibrant ecosystem of local groups carrying out essential work.

[EPIC's surveys](#) since 2018 reveal a striking fact: individual giving is among the top sources of funding for African civil society organizations, sometimes surpassing international grants. Contributions range from mobile giving platforms like M-Changa to alumni associations to everyday acts of covering school fees and hospital bills.

These practices are rarely labeled philanthropy, but they represent a deeply structured giving culture. As Rose emphasizes, the task is not to invent local giving but to recognize, value, and strengthen it.

Despite their impact, NGOs and community groups are often seen locally as donor-dependent or elitist. This perception undermines trust and reinforces the idea that civil society is accountable to outsiders rather than to citizens.



Rose argues that transparency, storytelling, and visibility are critical to shifting this narrative.

By documenting civil society's contributions - from advancing women's rights to driving independence movements - Africans can reclaim pride and ownership of their own development journey.

The recent decline in foreign aid presents both a crisis and an opportunity. For EPIC Africa, this is a wake-up call for radical rethinking, much like the political awakening of the 1960s. Communities have always shouldered the burden of survival; the future lies in building systems that reflect and strengthen this reality.

Governments can create enabling policies and tax incentives. Corporations can redirect mandatory social responsibility funds into community initiatives. Civil society can deepen accountability and trust at the local level. Together, these actions can form the backbone of a [resilient giving infrastructure](#).

Rose's message to development practitioners and philanthropists is clear: Local giving is not marginal, it is central to African survival and progress.

Investing in local philanthropy is not simply about filling funding gaps. It is about shifting power, shaping narratives, and reclaiming agency in the field of development economics.



COMMUNITY AS CO-INVESTOR: BEYOND THE BENEFICIARY LABEL



For generations, African communities have supported one another through giving circles, faith-based contributions, mutual aid, and neighbourly assistance. These traditions are central to African life, yet often overlooked in mainstream development financing. With international aid decreasing and external funders shifting their focus, it is time to recognize and support these long-standing practices. Community philanthropy is not a temporary fix; it promotes local ownership, dignity, and accountability, while adding value to development financing partnerships.

From Recipients to Co-Creators

For years, external donors have shaped African development, often viewing communities as recipients rather than partners. Community philanthropy changes this dynamic. It builds on assets that communities already hold, rather than relying solely on external sources. When local resources are brought to the table, a flatter power structure is created and traditional donor-beneficiary imbalances are challenged. As the Global Fund for Community Foundations notes, "Community philanthropy is not new, it is newly recognized. Its strength lies in promoting local ownership while bringing value to broader development partnerships."

When communities pool resources, set priorities, and hold one another accountable, they are no longer passive recipients, they become co-investors in their own development. This makes development collaborative, not just transactional.

New Article



Why It Matters Now

Now is the right time for communities to act as co-investors. Traditional African ways of working together continue to influence modern development. Local governance structures encourage public participation. Development funders are increasingly focusing on involving communities as partners in the design, planning, implementation, and oversight of projects. There is also growing interest in using civic spaces to enhance accountability and mobilize local resources as funding patterns shift.

Community philanthropy enables genuine, lasting development rooted in African traditions. Its strengths lie in promoting dignity and agency by centering community voices, strengthening partnerships by balancing local and external resources, and ensuring relevance by grounding decisions in lived realities. Yet, while these approaches are valued within communities, their impact often remains invisible to the broader development sector. Limited connections, scarce resources, and weak positioning make it harder for community philanthropy to be seen as a viable contributor to development financing.



Key challenges include underrepresentation in policy, lack of data, and capacity gaps in local organizations. Without visibility and support, these practices risk being underestimated despite their transformative potential. To ensure community philanthropy becomes a cornerstone of Africa's financing future, two priorities stand out: first, complementing inspiring narratives with hard numbers (such as amounts raised locally) to demonstrate that African philanthropy is vibrant and legitimate; and second, strengthening local ecosystems by investing in resilient organizations, leaders, and partnerships that can grow and sustain local giving.

As environmental advocate Van Jones reminds us, "When communities invest in their own solutions, they claim both the right and the responsibility to shape their future."



Toward Partnerships of Equals
Community philanthropy is not new in Africa; it is deeply rooted in the continent's culture. Recognizing it as part of development financing and treating communities as equal partners makes development both locally owned and globally relevant. As Dr. Akinwumi A. Adesina, President of the African Development Bank Group, has said: "The future of development financing in Africa will depend not on outside solutions, but on the generosity, resilience, and initiative of its own people."

To advance this vision, development practitioners and advocates of community-led development must acknowledge and integrate African giving traditions in financing decisions, engage communities as equal partners, advocate for enabling policies and incentives, strengthen the capacity of community philanthropy organizations and foundations, and share examples of local giving to inspire and expand these practices.



UPCOMING EVENTS

22 - 23

OCT

3rd Lightup Impact Days
Conference

Nairobi, Kenya

3 - 5

NOV

3rd African Venture Philanthropy
Alliance Conference

“Future-Proofing Africa, Driving
Sustainable Investments and
Innovations for Resilient Growth”

Nairobi, Kenya

13 - 15

NOV

African Summit on Entrepreneurship
and Innovation

“Innovation for Sustainable Future:
Reimagining Africa’s Entrepreneurship”

Kigali, Rwanda

2

DEC

#GivingTuesday

The GivingTuesday Africa Hub
celebrates the spirit of giving and
inspires positive social impact
across Africa.

OPPORTUNITY SPOTLIGHT

EARLY-STAGE SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

Got an idea growing in your hands? Something bold, local, and scalable, the kind of idea that makes you lose sleep (in a good way)? The [Draper Richards Kaplan Foundation](#) is on the lookout for social impact organizations tackling urgent global problems with solutions that don't just work today, but can grow tomorrow.



Global reach, Local roots.

DEAR DONORS,



At Lusoma, our work revolves around supporting organisations as they reimagine development practices by crafting approaches rooted in local priorities while still meeting international accountability demands. When I was asked to write this piece, I struggled with where to begin. Aid, philanthropy, and power have been discussed for decades; what fresh perspective could I offer? Then it struck me: perhaps the value lies not in adding more arguments to the debate, but in reframing it. What if we start with a simpler question, who do we call a donor, and what qualifies someone to be seen as one?

I begin with a stance of gratitude. For decades, international giving has sustained schools, hospitals, grassroots initiatives, and entire communities. Countless lives have been transformed because of this generosity. For this, I and many others remain deeply thankful.

Yet, gratitude also has a measure, it cannot exist without honesty. The structures of giving often carry unintended consequences such as power imbalances, bureaucratic burdens, and a donor-recipient dynamic that quietly erodes dignity.

The aid that arrives in the name of partnership can sometimes reinforce the very inequalities it seeks to dismantle.

Nowhere is this fragility clearer than in the recent shifts in foreign assistance budgets. Local NGOs everywhere are scrambling not because their work is ineffective, but because external politics, decided thousands of kilometres away, determine whether communities thrive or collapse. Local organizations bear the brunt of sudden withdrawals, exposing how little real power they hold. Aid is not merely charity; it is policy.

Receiving international donor funding is rarely a straightforward "gift." It often begins with proposals crafted more to fit donor templates and less to reflect community priorities. Alongside outcomes that reflect what the template permits them to and not what communities need most.

Compliance then follows: reports, metrics, audits. Justifiable and even necessary, and undeniably time-consuming. What begins as partnership can quickly slip into performance, forcing us to ask what partnership truly means.

As honesty continues her journey, here is an uncomfortable truth, it is donor money. Whether drawn from taxes, shareholder profits, or private philanthropy, the funds ultimately belong to those who provide them and with ownership comes oversight. Donors insist this is not domination but fiduciary duty. Another truth is the duality that exists in philanthropy: it is both an act of altruism and an agenda-setter. To deny this would be naïve. Ideally, giving in its purest form would be free of conditions. In reality, it rarely is.

Thus, we arrive at the paradox, donors must remain accountable at home, while recipients seek ownership abroad. How do we balance these competing truths? This is the tension at the heart of aid, and perhaps it will never be resolved fully, however it can be reframed and this is where my letter shifts.

For too long, the word donor has been monopolized by wealthy states, international NGOs, and billionaire philanthropists. The image it evokes is of faraway capitals, not our own neighborhoods. Yet generosity is everywhere.

By Nyakairu Ngovi

Take Kenya for example, ranked the second most generous country in the world (CAF World Giving Index, 2018), its tradition of harambee pooling resources for the common good. It has sustained schools, paid medical bills, and built infrastructure for decades. Churches, mosques, women's groups, and neighbourhood associations give daily. They may not call themselves donors, but their impact is undeniable.

Therefore, why reserve the title of "donor" for only a select few? And if we expanded the definition, wouldn't we also expand the possibilities of what giving could achieve? The way forward requires redefining who a donor is, and restructuring how giving works. For the communities in Africa and across the Global Majority, stop seeing yourselves as perpetual recipients. Local philanthropy like family giving, religious contributions, diaspora remittances, corporate responsibility is donor power. Equal in significance to foreign aid, and just as transformative. For the traditional donors, embrace decolonization not as a buzzword, but as practice. Fund core operations, not just projects. Trust local organizations to lead. Share power rather than dictate terms. Real partnership begins when charity gives way to solidarity.

In truth, donors are everywhere. They are the philanthropist writing a cheque and the grandmother organizing a fundraiser. They are international NGOs and neighborhood groups. They are us. Let us move together from dependency to authentic partnership, from giver-receiver binaries to shared solidarity. That is the future worth building.

With gratitude and resolve,

Nyakairu.



By Nyakairu Ngovi



#LUSOMACHALLENGE

Here we are, at the end of another Gazette. You've read the stories, felt the energy, and maybe even laughed at a line or two. But now comes the part where we stop nodding thoughtfully and actually ask: what will we do with all this?

Because if there's one thing this edition makes clear, it's that agency isn't waiting to be handed back. It's alive, it's local, and it's asking all of us to step up differently.

Here's the Lusoma Challenge:

- **For communities and local organizations:** Stop underestimating your own power. That giving circle, that community table banking, that religious fundraiser? It's not "just survival," it's philanthropy. It's development. Claim it. Celebrate it. Build on it.
- **For donors, both local and international:** Take a second look at the partnerships you're funding. Are they about compliance or about solidarity? Are you creating space for communities to lead, or are you still holding the pen while calling it co-creation? Reimagining agency means loosening the grip, and trusting the people closest to the problem to also be closest to the solution.
- **For all of us:** Notice where you've been waiting for permission. Then ask yourself: what would it look like to act without it? Whether that's piloting an idea, investing in local structures, or simply telling new stories about giving, small shifts create ripple effects.

Taking back our agency is not about finger-pointing. It's about shared courage. Communities daring to name their power. Donors daring to share theirs. Both sides daring to imagine partnerships that are honest, equal, and transformative.

As we close the year (because somehow it's already Christmas again, can someone please slow down the calendar?), let's not carry old habits into the new one. Let's carry agency. Let's carry hope. Above all, let's carry the conviction that development works best when it's not done to us or done for us, but done with us.

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