

# I am eternally grateful to CAMFED

**Zimbabwean Angeline Murimirwa (44) is CEO of the pan-African organisation Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED). She was one of the very first girls to be able to attend secondary school thanks to support from this NGO.**



Every girl who is able to attend school thanks to a subsidy, benefits from the support that helps her lift the pressure of expectations off her shoulders. After graduation, her chances of succeeding improve if she gets advice on job hunting, starting a business or if she receives seed capital from an experienced female professional. It's not only individual African girls who benefit, though. Rural communities piggyback along with the development and successes of members of their village. They no longer feel excluded and disadvantaged. They genuinely count. Due to her own lived experience, Angeline

Educating girls is one of the most efficient ways to combat poverty. Educated women get married at an older age, have fewer children, and the children they have are often healthier. They themselves are less likely to contract diseases such as HIV, they are less often the victim of gender-based violence and contribute substantially to their country's economy. CAMFED was established thirty years ago. Its mission was to combat poverty in Africa by giving girls access to education and training them to become young professionals. Since then, some 6.5 million girls from rural communities in Ghana, Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe have been able to attend school thanks to its subsidies. Funding from the Sint Antonius Foundation (SAS) has enabled CAMFED to send 40.000 girls to school in Malawi and Zimbabwe.

## Sisterhood

Besides being CEO, Angeline Murimirwa is also founder of CAMA (CAMFED Association), a growing network of a quarter of a million professional women serving as mentors and financiers for the next generation. Every CAMFED alumna takes two or three starting schoolgirls under their wing, enabling this kind of sisterhood support to spread throughout the participating African countries.



**Alice (second from left) ensures the education of eleven children**

Murimirwa is the best possible ambassador for CAMFED. She knows what it feels like when your parents are just about able to produce enough food to survive on, and when there is no money to pay for schooling. Murimirwa: 'In Africa, education is highly prized, and as a girl I was obsessed with school. I really loved learning and in the classroom I felt that I mattered. Children who are excluded from education due to poverty, are implicitly being told they're not important, that they don't deserve to develop themselves. At school, I felt seen and heard. Education gave me a sense of belonging. But during my final year at primary school, I realised: this is where

it stops for me. I had even been relatively fortunate, because my grandmother had left school at a much younger age. And my mother, the most intelligent pupil in her class, was forced to leave when she was about nine years old. Girls drop out earlier than boys because they have to take care of young children in the village. Schools are also often far away from villages, and walking such long distances back and forth is dangerous. Other reasons why girls leave school prematurely are teenage pregnancies and child marriages.'

## Ticket

'My parents wanted nothing more than for

## Veronica's weaving enterprise offers training and jobs to young women



## Lunch at the secondary school in Chikomba East, Zimbabwe







Learner guide Sophia with student Hanipha

me to continue my education. They were well aware of the opportunities secondary education could bring. It's a ticket out of poverty. But for them, it was just like admiring expensive items in a shop window: far beyond their financial means.

To my immeasurable good fortune, CAMFED existed in 1992. In my district, they had asked the village schools to select the three best pupils among the roughly six hundred children. I got the highest exam marks that anyone had ever achieved at my village school. When I went to get my results, all the teachers and the parents from the parents' committee were standing there waiting for me. When I saw my marks, I burst into tears. I thought: this is it, my race is run, this is where school

ends for me. The school management then told me that CAMFED wanted to support me, so I could continue my schooling. I didn't believe them. I thought: who on earth would help a poor girl whom they don't even know? Even today, girls who receive support from CAMFED respond in the same way: this is too good to be true.

At boarding school, I received a school uniform and my first pair of new shoes – I didn't even know my shoe size. Throughout that entire first year, I regularly feared they would soon take all this away from me again. I was happy, but I also suffered from survivor syndrome. I felt guilty because I was able to continue my education, but others couldn't. My mother sold two buckets of corn to be able to buy me a sheet and a toothbrush for boarding school. She brought me there; it was also the realisation of her dream. Whenever I speak about the injustice of being denied an education, I'm reminded of my mother. I have a college degree, I'm married and I have four children. I am eternally grateful to CAMFED that I was able to break the cycle of women in my family, who were never able to continue their education. I know what it means to get an education, and I wish this for everyone. That's why I work as hard as I can for CAMFED and the CAMA support network, to help elevate African women even further.'



# I'm hopeful that we will have eradicated leprosy by 2040

Physician Liesbeth Mieras has over 25 years of international experience in the fields of public health and infectious diseases. She is a medical-technical consultant for the Leprastichting and coordinates multiple projects from the organisation's international offices in Amsterdam. The Sint Antonius Foundation (SAS) funds Leprastichting projects in Mozambique and Nigeria, two countries where leprosy is still relatively prevalent, especially in the poorest communities.



**How is it possible that leprosy is still common? Other contagious infectious diseases, such as smallpox, cholera and very recently Covid-19 too, have all been largely suppressed.**

'One of the main reasons is that leprosy is poverty-related. Most people have effective immune systems and therefore wouldn't fall ill if they were infected by leprosy bacteria. Leprosy occurs among the poorest people on the planet, marginalised groups for whom medical help and human rights cannot be taken for granted. Their voices are often not heard. Leprosy is one of the neglected tropical diseases in which far too little is invested to be able to eradicate it. There is insufficient

funding to do research into improved detection and treatment. Many policymakers and financiers don't even know that leprosy is still so prevalent.'

**How did you become aware of how widespread the problem is?**

'Twenty-five years ago, when I was starting out as a doctor specialising in tropical diseases, I was detached to Mozambique. I partnered with a doctor there who was working for the Leprastichting. At that time, my knowledge of leprosy was absolutely inadequate, so I learned a huge amount during that initial stint. It became clear to me how difficult it is to detect leprosy in time and to treat it. You have to