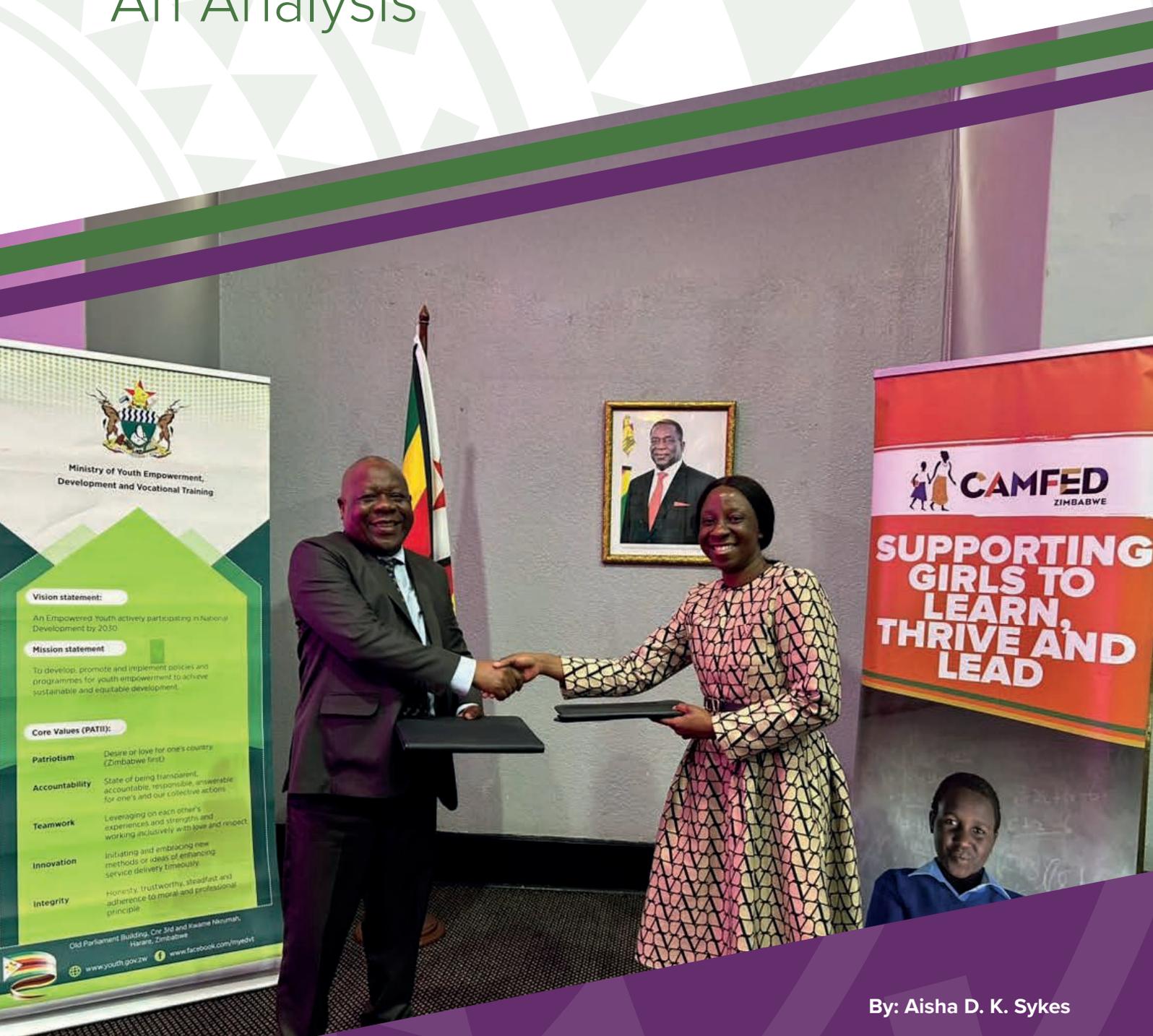




Documenting CAMFED's Partnering Practices with Governments

An Analysis



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Front cover photo: CAMFED Zimbabwe's National Executive Director at the signing of a MOU with a representative of the Zimbabwe Ministry of Youth

This page: Representatives from Tanzania's Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) at a regional exchange learning visit in Dodoma.

◆ Introduction

As part of its ongoing work in Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, CAMFED continues to employ a collaborative partnership approach with the Governments of the three countries, aiming to explore how innovative education programs, such as the Learner Guide Program, can effectively and successfully support national education systems. This synthesis and analysis is part of a broader effort, supported by the Global Partnership for Education Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (GPE KIX), a joint endeavor with the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada.

This synthesis will explore CAMFED's key characteristics of practices which have emerged in this experience, which appear to be effective in successfully partnering with government entities, specifically those charged with overseeing education and other areas pertinent to the lives of youth. It will also examine how these partnerships evolve depending on context and location, ensuring the integration of education-based innovations into national policies and strategies, and supporting systems transformation in the countries that they work in. The strength of these partnerships lies not only in the alignment of objectives but also in CAMFED's approach to embedding ideas of innovation within existing government structures. Through this engagement, CAMFED is not merely seen as an external implementing body with significant experience in working to support governments' work with marginalized girls, but as a vital contributor to national development goals as their work aligns and complements that of governments. CAMFED aims to share its model of how partners can engage with governments for greater success and results, as has been evidenced in CAMFED's engagement thus far. This synthesis will delve into how CAMFED has built and/or maintained such strong relationships, emphasizing key practices and what they have learned.

Government partnerships are crucial to CAMFED's mission of ensuring that marginalized children, especially girls, receive quality education. The organization's work is deeply embedded in working within national education plans, making it a sustainable partner in long-term educational reforms. Evidence from the Learner Guide Program demonstrates how collaborative efforts yield measurable success, offering valuable insights into how other organizations can build and foster government partnerships.

The overall observation is that there are seven key practices that underpin how CAMFED works with governments to advocate and contribute towards the education of marginalized girls:



Figure 1. Practices for Government partnerships adopted by CAMFED

These approaches, which were observed through engagements with stakeholders from within the CAMFED team, Government partners, and CAMFED Association (CAMA) members, are deeply embedded in many of CAMFED’s principles including accountability, child protection, transparency, dignity, partnerships, and leadership. This congruence between what the organization says it does, and what stakeholders recognize in them, speaks to the way in which these values and principles are deeply entrenched in how CAMFED works, and what they do.

Process

CAMFED engaged Aisha Sykes, a Tanzania-based global consultant who is familiar with the organization's work, to gather insights from key stakeholders through conversations, and to synthesize themes about partnering practices. Respondents were invited to speak openly about the factors that they believe contribute to the good working relationship between governments and CAMFED, and also to share any challenges faced. The conversations aimed at gathering data about how CAMFED works in collaboration with government to support their existing programs, and to examine the institutional-level individual relationships, to see what transferable knowledge could be shared to capture how the work of the two entities aligns. Here it is key to clarify that when the term 'government' is used, it refers predominantly to the ministries that CAMFED works closely with, including ministries of education, of youth, and any others that work directly on education- and youth-adjacent matters.

As part of this process government stakeholders and CAMFED staff participated in key informant interviews (KIIs). In these mostly one-on-one interviews, the objective was to eke out the nuanced aspects of relationship-building and partnering that could be shared with external entities, including government, who are curious about some of the ways on how this can be done, and what has worked for CAMFED. KIIs sought to ask open-ended questions around what has worked/is working, what has not worked/is not working, and to try to identify the 'secret sauce' - the deliberate practices and the unexpected ones - that have led to impactful and results-driven partnerships between CAMFED and governments in Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Over the course of the assignment, a Learning Visit was held in Dodoma, Tanzania, where government officials and CAMFED staff from Zambia and Zimbabwe visited Tanzania to learn about how scaling has worked, how government partnerships are strengthened, and how government and CAMFED overcome obstacles they face when working together. The multi-day investigation visit included trips to schools where the government is co-delivering the scaling of the Life Skills Facilitator Program, and also a knowledge exchange session that the consultant was able to participate in, to understand the questions and ideas being engaged with.

In addition, key documents from this Program were shared, to enable the consultant to align the insights from KIIs with existing documents, reports, and research – both internal and external. The process also involved examining language used by the teams, styles of working, and human resources elements; attempting to take a 360° approach to understanding CAMFED and the government's partnering practices for greater systems transformation in the education sector.

◆ Partnering Practices



MoPSE Permanent Secretary meets a secondary student at a regional exchange learning visit in Dodoma, Tanzania.



1. Collaborative and Respectful Engagement

Both CAMFED and government partners are clear that their joint success hinges on their collaborative relationships at all levels. As a starting point, CAMFED understands that its role is to support quality education for all children, especially marginalized girls - and supporting government efforts towards this goal is crucial. Throughout its engagement with government CAMFED remains a non-political entity, working in a strictly non-partisan way as a partner. This collaboration ensures that CAMFED's work is always community driven and locally led, part of national efforts, and fully integrated. CAMFED, as an organization, understands that its role is to support governments. While it aligns its interventions with existing government priorities, it also actively contributes to shaping these priorities and interventions. This approach ensures that the government, as the mandate owner, remains at the forefront, while CAMFED earns and builds trust and long-term partnerships.

The research explored the question of whether the individual or the role/role holder was the key lever to ensuring productive collaboration for systems transformation. While individual relationships are often emphasized, CAMFED has learned that it is the mandate and authority of the role held by government representatives that ultimately determine the success of collaboration. This finding underscores the importance of engaging with government officials in their formal capacities, ensuring that partnerships are institutionalized within government structures rather than relying solely on personal relationships. CAMFED ensures they collaborate with individuals holding the appropriate mandates, allowing for effective implementation within clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

Reflecting this perspective, the word 'consultation' was used repeatedly by senior country-level CAMFED members, to explain how they work with government, with communities, and with girls and young women. Other themes that emerged in the various conversations were around "ongoing and respectful dialogue" with all stakeholders. In the spirit of collaboration, the signing of Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) between CAMFED and government ministries solidifies the partnerships formed. The MoUs provide formal recognition and approval of CAMFED's role in supporting national education goals, creating a framework for collaboration that is well understood by both parties. In Tanzania, for instance, the MoU is a tripartite agreement involving the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST); the President's Office for Regional Administration and Local Government (PO-RALG); and CAMFED. This five-year agreement aligns CAMFED's work with government priorities in education policy, science, and technology, as well as the government's drive to advance and address gender equality and leadership development for girls. As formal documents, the MoUs are also essential vehicles of continuity, confirming commitments of support and service through transitions of elected representatives and non-elected government officials.

An important feature of the MoU model is that it outlines not only the areas of collaboration, but also the specific roles and responsibilities of each party. This clarity helps prevent misunderstandings and ensures that CAMFED's work is fully integrated within existing government structures. In Zambia, CAMFED partners with both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Youth, Sports & Arts, recognizing that education and youth development are closely linked. Courtesy calls, familiarization visits, and alignment discussions are key steps to inform clear understanding of roles before formal agreements are signed and enable the team to forge relationships that complement the formal documentation.

Beyond how CAMFED engages with the government, CAMFED is also respectful and mindful of how it engages and refers to the clients they serve and partner with - girls and young women. As part of internal communication practices the team is deliberate about which words can be used, how images are taken and shared, and where their clients (girls) are in the entire ecosystem of the work being done. Safeguarding is at the center of CAMFED's work, and this is enshrined in their Child Protection Policy which all staff, consultants, and partners must sign and adhere to. Engaging with the teams at CAMFED it was clear that little is done without intention and conceptual robustness when engaging with terminologies, and even in sharing imagery where the girls are involved. There exists a clear focus on placing girls and young women at the center of the work, including taking solid measures to safeguard their safety and their dignity, alongside the deep commitment to the agency and capability of the girls

and young women themselves. In the former, coaching is conducted for the clients to ensure that they are aware of the potential consequences of engagements, be it posting their photo or accepting an invitation to speak. At the same time, there is a deep confidence in the competence of the girls and young women, giving them the space and respect to tell and own their stories.

CAMFED communication aims to use this particular approach rather than a 'power over' approach as this aligns well with the respect, dignity, and agency that it believes should be accorded to all. In giving opportunities for voices to be heard, for individuals to speak for themselves (be they staff, government partners, the communities, or girls from within the community), and for use of vocabulary that builds on this respect, they foster greater collaboration and a deep sense of equal partnership. CAMFED does not exist to speak for girls and young women, or governments, but seeks to support them in all spaces where they are invited to ensure that the dignity and respect they are given at CAMFED are perpetuated as much as possible.



CAMFED Association members meet a senior traditional leader at a CAMFED Community Development Committee meeting in Neno, Malawi.



2. Aligning on Purpose and Ownership

One of the core strengths of CAMFED’s approach is the alignment between the organization’s objectives and those of the governments with which they collaborate. Both CAMFED and government partners share a commitment to providing equitable access to education, especially for marginalized children, and particularly girls in rural and peri-urban areas. This alignment is not just in terms of policy but also in purpose: CAMFED’s work contributes where there is a government-identified gap, and actively participates in the development of solutions. As an advisor to the governments that it works with, CAMFED also contributes to sharing insights where they come across them through their work. This creates a strong foundation for collaboration, as both parties are focused on the same outcome—improving the lives of marginalized girls through education. CAMFED also works to identify solutions that shape priorities and strategies, while recognizing and respecting that the ultimate mandate and accountability remain with government ministries and local authorities.

In interviews with government officials they repeatedly acknowledged that CAMFED comes to them to co-create these solutions that address real and immediate challenges within their education systems. Instead of proposing theoretical models, CAMFED presents evidence-based programs, such as the Learner Guide Program, which has been developed and refined over years of field experience. This practical, solutions-oriented approach ensures that CAMFED’s interventions are grounded in the realities faced by schools and communities, which helps to build government buy-in and ownership from the outset.

Ownership is further cemented by encouraging government partners to speak about the work that they have co-created with CAMFED. Government co-owns the work being done, and therefore they have the space and opportunity to engage with their partners, citizens, and many others to speak about the work in their own words, and in their own way. A 2024 Learning Visit to Tanzania involving officials from Zambia and Zimbabwe saw the CAMFED team providing the initial introduction to the Learner Guide Program, but the host government officials took the lead in presenting how they adapted the model. During this presentation and the Q&A session that followed, participants discussed what is working and not working, what would/could work in their respective contexts, and what might need to be adjusted. This highlights how governments view the co-ownership of the work, rather than the work being that of an external entity. By giving government partners the space to discuss the Program in their own words, CAMFED ensures that the work becomes truly embedded within national systems, and owned by those who will implement it.

Another aspect of CAMFED’s success in aligning on purpose is its readiness to adapt programs to fit local contexts. The Learner Guide Program,¹ for example, is designed to be flexible enough to work within different countries’ educational frameworks while still maintaining its core objectives. By working closely with government stakeholders, CAMFED ensures that the Program can be tailored to meet the specific needs and priorities of each country. This adaptability further strengthens government ownership, as the Program is not seen as a rigid, one-size-fits-all solution but as something that can evolve with local needs and contexts. For example, in Tanzania it is referred to as the Life Skills Facilitator Program, where in Zambia it is the Learner Guide Program, and in Zimbabwe it is the Peer Educator Program. The key principles are the same, however the naming is different to align with national preferences and priorities. Similarly, in Tanzania and Zimbabwe there are Scaling Advisory Committees (SACs), but in Zambia there has been preference to refer to these as Scaling Technical Committees (STCs) as they see their role as more technical.² These adjustments to fit the country contexts enable the structures to be more effective in ownership and achieving the intended objectives.

In addition to fostering ownership through participation and adaptability, CAMFED also emphasizes transparency in its partnerships with the government, not only through information sharing but also in open engagement and gathering information together. Regular reporting, joint monitoring visits, and open communication channels all help build trust and ensure that governments feel fully informed.

¹ [The CAMFED Learner Guide Program - Creating a better world](#)

² SACs/STCs are comprised of Ministry of Education representatives, other relevant education/youth stakeholders from local government, CAMA members, CAMFED staff.

CAMFED's model of engagement creates structures through the SACs and STCs, and processes through which government representatives, civil society members, youth/young women, teachers, and technical experts convene regularly. These committees build a nuanced understanding of the elements of the Program and gather evidence about the impact that elements of the Program contribute to education, as well as to post-secondary youth development. Armed with this knowledge and confidence in the value of the Program, they can explore how its components might be scaled and adapted into government systems in different countries. The research used a real-time feedback approach where data is constantly collected and analyzed; with a focus on how elements of the Learner Guide Program can be endorsed and then integrated into national education systems. Due to the trust established over the years, and the mechanisms for checks and balances embedded into the process, the teams are able to take an agile approach to solving local challenges.

CAMFED's ability to align on purpose and foster a deep sense of ownership among government partners is central to its success. By co-developing programs, grounded in a clear need where the two parties are aligned, and by ensuring active government participation, CAMFED builds partnerships that are not only effective but also sustainable.



3. Locally Led, Embedded, and Sustainable Programs

An impactful dimension of this approach is that it not only engages government partners at the national level, but it also deeply roots the Program within the communities it serves. A flagship example is its focus on engaging local young women, previously at-risk or marginalized, who have completed their education to return to the schools in their communities as role models and mentors.

Known as Learner Guides, they work alongside teachers to identify children who are at risk of dropping out, but also to ‘walk with’ the girls so that they feel they have a support system that is accessible and relatable. In addition to Learner Guides, they deliver life skills sessions through the “My Better World” curriculum (co-created by CAMFED and community members) offering both academic support and personal development skills to marginalized children. This localized support ensures that content is relevant to the students’ social and cultural contexts, making it more effective and sustainable.

The Learner Guides, most of whom grew up in the same communities as the students they now support, are uniquely positioned to understand the specific challenges these girls face. They understand local languages and are familiar with formal and informal power and support structures within the community. Armed with this understanding, and with their own lived experience, they are able to act as trusted intermediaries between the school and the community, strengthening the home-school link through home visits and follow-ups. This proximity allows Learner Guides to identify at-risk children, providing early interventions, and helping to mitigate the factors contributing to school dropouts. Their deep understanding of the local environment and the lived experiences of the girls makes them invaluable in creating a truly inclusive education ecosystem which provides social as well as material and academic support. They also mobilize local resources and support, enforcing the community aspect of the Program.

In addition, a significant component of the Learner Guide Program’s success is its close alignment with government structures, both nationally and locally. The Program is deliberately structured in a way that complements existing government systems, rather than creating parallel or competing plans. This alignment ensures that the Program is seen as an enhancement to national education efforts rather than an external initiative that operates in isolation. By working within existing government structures, CAMFED helps ensure that its interventions are not only effective but also sustainable, as they can be integrated into national education strategies and policies.

In addition to the Program’s alignment with government efforts, its localized nature contributes to its sustainability. Unlike many other initiatives that rely on external experts or short-term volunteers, Learner Guides are from the same communities as the students they support; they have also gone through the same education they seek to improve. They are in their home space, they are known to others in the communities and thus are likely more trusted, better understood, and viewed with less suspicion than an outsider. They are also there to stay (for the most part) and are not just in the location because of a ‘job’. This enables Learner Guides to take on leadership roles that contribute to the educational development of future generations within their own communities.

A third factor contributing to the Program’s sustainability is its adaptability to local contexts and specific needs. While the core objectives of the Learner Guide Program remain consistent — supporting marginalized girls to stay in school and succeed — how the Program is implemented can vary depending on the specific needs of the community. This flexibility is crucial in ensuring that the Program remains relevant and effective, even as local conditions change. For instance, in some communities Learner Guides may focus more on addressing cultural barriers to education, while in others, they may prioritize providing academic support or addressing issues of child protection.

In addition, STCs and SACs conduct visits to rural and remote schools, districts, and communities to observe, meet and engage in discussions with school authorities, teachers, and other actors in the space of improving learning outcomes and supporting equitable and quality education for all children. The committees participate in visits to other countries where CAMFED works, to see how SACs/STCs form a key layer in the locally-grounded approach, but also close (in proximity) to the marginalized girls, for evidence on whether policies are as effective as presumed.

CAMFED and the government’s willingness to embed operations within government offices at the local level enhances the sustainability of the work being done. By maintaining a physical presence and proximity in government offices, CAMFED can remain closely involved in the day-to-day realities of the education system, ensuring that its programs are responsive to emerging needs and challenges. This proximity also allows CAMFED to maintain strong relationships with local government officials, which is critical for the long-term success of its work. By being present alongside the government, CAMFED staff can work with their government partners, share insights, and develop joint solutions to challenges as they arise. This further allows for a programmatic agility that responds to problems in real-time.

The sustainability of CAMFED’s interventions is further reinforced by the organization’s commitment to bring to the fore local actors, particularly women and girls, to take ownership of their communities’ educational outcomes. The Learner Guides are not just passive participants in a program—they are active agents of change within their communities. They provide the home-school link by conducting home visits, which bridges a gap that teachers cannot fill. By giving young women the opportunity to return to their schools and support the next generation of learners, CAMFED creates a cycle of perpetual growth that is able to sustain itself over time. This model not only improves educational outcomes for marginalized children, but also builds local leadership capacity within these young women, which is essential for long-term social and economic development, and gender equality.

CAMFED’s locally led, embedded, and sustainable approach to education ensures that its programs have a lasting impact because they are woven into the existing fabric of the community. By aligning its interventions with government systems, leveraging local knowledge and leadership, and maintaining a close connection to the people it serves, CAMFED ensures that its work is both effective and resilient. This model demonstrates the power of community-driven solutions in addressing systemic challenges in education.



4. Trust and Longevity

Building long-term relationships based on trust is a key pillar of CAMFED's success in working with government partners, and even with its own team. Change, especially systemic transformation in education, requires patience and persistence, and CAMFED understands that quick wins are rare in this sector. This is reflected in its strategy, showing a commitment to gradual, sustained progress. In addition, we know that staff who are dissatisfied with their roles, the leadership, or their treatment are unlikely to remain within an organization. The same values and practices that have enabled CAMFED to build long relationships externally appear to be reflected internally, allowing them to build deep relationships within the team.

Longevity is seen in the organization's staff, some of whom have been with the organization for a decade or even two. This speaks volumes about job satisfaction, but also about commitment to consistency and longevity. Commitment is one of CAMFED's principles, and it is exemplified well in the staff, how long many of them have been with the organization, and also how they work. The National Directors for Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Tanzania have each been with CAMFED for at least 14 years, with other staff reporting tenures of several years as well. This sustained presence allows CAMFED to build deep, trusting relationships with government officials, school leaders, and community members through its staff, who are the ones who interface regularly with these various stakeholders. It also demonstrates that CAMFED is not just focused on short-term results, but is committed to thinking about how to systemically be a long-term partner in the education system's development, and one way of doing this is ensuring a work environment and culture that lends itself to this sort of longevity. Staff retention and satisfaction is one such way because it allows for trust to be cultivated in the long-term.

CAMFED appears to have earned its trust through consistency in its operations and practices. Government officials, in particular, have praised CAMFED for delivering on its promises and remaining consistent in what they say and what they do. When there is misalignment, it is resolved using respectful and solutions-driven dialogue towards a mutual agreement. This collaborative spirit has allowed CAMFED to integrate its programs into the fabric of national education systems, ensuring they are seen as a natural extension of government efforts to reach marginalized children.

The organization's focus on building trust also extends to the local level, where CAMFED is deeply rooted in the communities it serves. This embeddedness is not just physical - though some CAMFED staff are co-located within government premises - but also relational. Locating many CAMFED offices within local government premises and communities strengthens transparency, meaning the lines of communication and engagement remain open. This is both conceptually and physically, where government officials and CAMFED staff work closely with local authorities, school leaders, and community members to ensure that their programs are responsive to the specific needs of each area. This localized approach helps build a sense of trust and ownership at the grassroots level, making it easier for CAMFED's programs to be adopted and sustained over time.

Trust is further reinforced through CAMFED's consistent delivery of measurable results. The success stories of girls who have finished school, some returning as part of the Learner Guide Program, and have then gone on to become leaders in their communities, serve as living examples of the Program's impact. These real-life cases provide tangible evidence of CAMFED's effectiveness, making it easier for government officials, community leaders, and families to trust the organization's methods and interventions. When government partners and local communities can see the direct impact of CAMFED's work, it builds confidence in the organization's ability to deliver meaningful change.

CAMFED's ability to build trust and maintain long-term relationships through its staff members, as well as with government and community partners, is central to its success. Through consistency, local embeddedness, mutual respect, and longevity, CAMFED ensures that its work is seen as trustworthy, reliable, and aligned with the needs of the communities it serves. It is this long term and deeply committed approach that the organization knows will lead to the transformation it wishes to see in the lives of girls and young women, alongside the recognition that there is a sense of urgency towards ensuring that this happens. Trust is the foundation upon which CAMFED's long-term impact is built, ensuring that its programs continue to thrive and grow over time.



5. Clear, Simple, and Visible Evidence

CAMFED's work is grounded in clear, simple, and visible evidence. The results are as evident as a young woman standing in front of government officials, her community, and external audiences to talk about her life, and the journey she has been through, to where she is today. The Learner Guide Program provides a perfect example of this. The young women who return to their communities to serve as role models are living proof of the transformative power of education. They are not just theoretical success stories — they are tangible, visible evidence that girls from marginalized backgrounds can succeed if given the right support. This is crucial in gaining the trust of both government partners and local communities, as it demonstrates that CAMFED's interventions are real and impactful.

The evidence of CAMFED's success is not confined to numbers and statistics, though these are certainly important. **What makes CAMFED's work so compelling is that its evidence is human - it is embodied in the young women who have benefitted from the programs and now act as role models for others.** These women are known in their communities; their families, neighbors, and local leaders can see firsthand how education has changed their lives. They then go on to provide a very real example of what the future can hold, through the concept of modelling behavior. This type of evidence is powerful because it resonates on a personal level with people across all educational backgrounds. Parents, teachers, and government officials can easily understand the impact because it is visible and relatable. The girls and young women they see are ones they have known for many years, and thus they can speak to the transformation they have witnessed in them.

Another aspect of CAMFED's evidence-based approach is the simplicity of its pathway to transformation. Rather than relying on complex theories of change that may be difficult to grasp, CAMFED's programs are straightforward and easily understood. The Learner Guide Program, for example, is simple in concept—young women return to their local schools to mentor and support the next generation of students—but its impact is profound. This makes it easier for government partners to adopt and integrate CAMFED's programs into their own systems, as the interventions do not require extensive retraining or restructuring, or even explanation.

In addition to the visible success of the Learner Guides, CAMFED also places a strong emphasis on data collection and evaluation. The organization conducts rigorous monitoring and evaluation to track the progress of the programs and measure outcomes. Government partners participate throughout in identifying questions and the kind of evidence they need to assess the program and its progress. This data-driven approach helps CAMFED to continually refine its interventions, ensuring that they remain effective and responsive to the needs of marginalized girls, together with local authorities. Government partners appreciate this commitment to evidence-based programming, as it supports their own focus on accountability and results.

Visible evidence also plays a crucial role in CAMFED's ability to scale its programs. When government officials and community leaders see the success of the Learner Guide Program in one area, it makes it easier for them to envision how the Program could be scaled to other regions or even nationally. This ability to demonstrate impact on a small scale helps CAMFED to build momentum for broader systemic transformation. Government partners are more likely to invest in scaling CAMFED's programs when they can see clear, tangible evidence of success in their own communities.

The Government of Tanzania has endorsed the adoption of the Learner Guide Program into their own Life Skills Facilitator Program, and the partnership model underlying this integration process has formed the basis for additional collaborations.³ This was communicated by Tanzania's Deputy Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology on 23rd September 2021, where she shared:

³ [Scaling the Learner Guide Program in Tanzania - CAMFED](#)

“Looking at the impact of this youth-led program and the recommendations provided from the technical team who were part of the scaling process, I am convinced that the Learner Guide Program is worthy of government support” – Professor Carolyne Nombo, Deputy Permanent Secretary.

CAMFED’s commitment to clear, simple, and visible evidence is a key factor in its success. By focusing on communicating human stories, simple interventions, and tracking transformation, CAMFED ensures that its programs are easily understood and trusted by its partners. This evidence-based approach helps to build confidence in CAMFED’s work and lays the foundation for broader adoption and scaling of the work being done.



CAMFED Tanzania AGM 2024. Background banner translates as 'Invest in Education for SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT'.



6. Keen Understanding of the Range of Stakeholders

CAMFED undertakes deliberate efforts to know and understand the various stakeholders it engages with. Recognizing that it is sustained relationships across all areas of its work that will ensure strong results, the team engages with each individual as a unique person, not just a statistic or a role. This personalized approach is a cornerstone of CAMFED's strategy, recognizing that each girl's situation is distinct and that standardized solutions are often ineffective when addressing complex, context-specific barriers to education.

CAMFED rejects the notion of providing blanket, one-size-fits-all support to all girls and young women, recognizing that the obstacles they face are as diverse as the communities in which they live. Instead, CAMFED works to address the specific needs of each girl, considering her personal circumstances, the local cultural context, and the resources available to her. Whether it is material support such as school fees or uniforms, or more personalized interventions like mentoring and life skills development, CAMFED ensures that each girl receives the support she needs to overcome her unique challenges. This tailored approach is critical in making CAMFED's programs not only effective but also deeply impactful at the individual level.

While this personalized support may pose challenges in terms of reporting at a large scale and resource allocation, CAMFED has established strong accountability structures to ensure that every intervention is justified and trackable. Here, the Community Development Committees (CDCs) play a key role. The CDC is composed of District Education Officers (DEOs), CAMA representatives, local representatives from local Government Ministries, Victim Support officers, and Social Welfare officers; these district-level committees coordinate and steer CAMFED programs. Through regular termly school visits they can alert CAMFED and act quickly when they recognize a girl facing a challenge that threatens her ability to remain in school. This is one of the measures in place as part of the organization's commitment to transparency and trust-building, which is reflected in its internal mechanisms, which include checks and balances to monitor the distribution of support. There are mechanisms for avoiding any nepotism at the local level, particularly through the committees that meet to deliberate on the realities of the girls that they serve. These systems ensure that resources are allocated where they are most needed and that the support provided genuinely addresses the barriers each girl faces in her educational journey. All these are structures that aim at fostering a deep sense of community rootedness, and an ecosystem of collective ownership that rests on the idea of an inclusive local partnership infrastructure that supports girls.

CAMFED's ability to offer personalized support is also closely tied to its deep understanding of its stakeholders, both at the community and government levels. The organization does not view stakeholders as abstract title and role-holders but as individuals with distinct responsibilities, perspectives, values, and areas of focus. In each country where CAMFED operates, the team invests time and effort in understanding the political economy landscape, decoding not just the formal structures, but also the informal networks that influence decision-making. This detailed stakeholder mapping allows CAMFED to engage with the right individuals at the right time, ensuring that partnerships are effective and mutually beneficial.

Importantly, CAMFED's approach to stakeholder engagement goes beyond formal roles. While engaging with individuals based on their official capacities is important, CAMFED also builds informal but meaningful relationships that extend beyond job titles. The organization understands that people, not just positions, drive transformation, and it nurtures these relationships with care and respect. To quote a CAMFED team member, "there is the role, then there is **the person as a person.**"⁴ This recognizes that all stakeholders they engage with, including government officials, have multiple and sometimes competing priorities in their calendars. CAMFED is mindful that they are one actor amongst many, and continue to think carefully about how to build relationships that allow all involved to focus on making things work, and getting things to move.

⁴ Emphasis added to reflect the tone of the statement.

Recognizing that it is key for individuals to feel seen and heard, they cultivate connections that are genuine, and value the individuals they work with beyond the role that they hold. CAMFED ensures that its partnerships are resilient, even in the face of changes in government personnel or shifts in political roles.

CAMFED's keen understanding of its stakeholders, and its commitment to providing personalized support and building individual relationships, are critical to its success. By recognizing the individuality of each girl and each partner, CAMFED ensures that its interactions and engagements are tailor-made, to ensure greater likelihood of success. This individualized, dignified approach builds trust, fosters strong long-term relationships, and ultimately provides a sturdy foundation upon which the work it seeks to do can be done.



CAMFED Association Peer Educators meet Ministry of Education officials at an exchange visit in a school in Dodoma, Tanzania.



7. Humility as a Way of Being

Humility is at the heart of CAMFED’s approach to engaging with governments, communities, and young women. This core value is expressed through CAMFED’s practice of inviting partners to co-develop programs, rather than presenting ready-made solutions. Government officials and other stakeholders have repeatedly noted that CAMFED does not come with a program developed that they expect the government to implement, but instead actively involves government partners in the design, adaptation, and implementation of educational initiatives. This collaborative approach fosters trust and respect, making CAMFED a valued partner rather than just another external actor.

All government partners engaged during this process mentioned humility, respect, or some variation of these terms as the ‘magic’ of how CAMFED engages with them. “CAMFED does not come to us with a fully cooked program and expect us to implement it. They invite us to develop it with them,” said one official.

Understanding that the mandate of delivering education and setting education policies lies with the government, CAMFED team members communicate that their role is to support, and not to take on the role of one who has all the answers. As a result, all their engagement with their government partners comes from a place of:

- 1) respect for the young people (especially marginalized girls) that they work for/serve;
- 2) respect for the government and its mandate;
- 3) respect for the communities within which they engage; and
- 4) respect for one another as members of the same team.

This draws from CAMFED’s principles as an organization, which include: accountability, child protection, urgency, transparency, dignity, leadership, partnerships, measurement, and commitment. It is evident that these are not just words that CAMFED has chosen, but a purposeful reflection of their posturing internally and externally. **CAMFED’s humility is reflected in the way it approaches its partnerships with the government. Recognizing that the responsibility for setting education policies and delivering services lies with government institutions, CAMFED positions itself as a supportive partner, not the lead.** This distinction is critical, as it allows CAMFED to work within the existing government structures and respect the authority of government officials, rather than trying to override or bypass them. CAMFED’s team members emphasize their role in supporting the government’s efforts, ensuring that their programs are first, and most importantly, aligned with national education priorities.

Humility is also evident in how CAMFED views the communities it serves. The organization recognizes that marginalized girls and their families are not passive beneficiaries of support, but active participants in the development of their own futures. CAMFED’s programs are designed with a deep respect for the experiences and perspectives of these girls, ensuring that interventions are tailored to their unique needs and contexts. By involving the girls, their families, and communities in decision-making processes, CAMFED demonstrates respect for their agency and dignity.

A key expression of this value is CAMFED’s Child Protection Policy and Code of Practice, which begins with “CAMFED’s vision is of a world in which every child is educated, protected, respected and valued, and grows up to turn the tide of poverty.” The inclusion of respect and value as core tenets of the policy, reflects CAMFED’s belief in the inherent worth of every individual, particularly the marginalized girls and young women it serves. The policy also applies to everyone involved in CAMFED’s work, from staff members to volunteers and government partners, ensuring that respect and humility are embedded throughout operations.

In practical terms, CAMFED’s humility translates into a willingness to listen to and learn from its government and community partners.

What is evident in engaging with various stakeholders is that this is not a one-sided relationship where CAMFED assumes it has all the answers, or is assumed to have all the answers. Instead, the organization is constantly learning from its partners and adjusting its programs accordingly; taking feedback from government officials on how best to integrate the Learner Guide Program into national education systems; or listening to the experiences of young women who have completed the program and are part of the CAMA network. CAMFED values the insights of those closest to the issues at hand.

Finally, humility is embodied in the way CAMFED team members engage with one another. Within the organization, there is a strong sense of mutual respect and collaboration. Team members across different countries and levels of responsibility work together to achieve CAMFED's mission, valuing the contributions of every individual. There is little evidence of 'helicoptering in' to tell national teams what to do, but many examples of how the teams feel emboldened and authorized to act as needed. This internal culture of respect mirrors the external engagement and creates a congruence that augurs well for CAMFED's operations.

Whilst the organization has other key values, it is respect and humility that appear to be the foundational principles that resonate well within and externally. By positioning itself as a supportive partner, listening to local perspectives, and fostering mutual respect, CAMFED ensures that all parties have their voices and opinions heard and valued. This humility, combined with a long-term commitment allows CAMFED to build deep, trusting partnerships that drive educational transformation.

◆ Conclusion

CAMFED's partnership practices showcase a long-term and thoughtful approach to systems transformation in education, constantly reflecting and reiterating as realities change and progress continues. In serving as a trusted and embedded partner, CAMFED is aligned with national priorities, ensuring that its programs integrate into existing government frameworks. This strategic alignment is critical for creating sustainable interventions that can scale and adapt across different contexts, from Zambia, to Tanzania, to Zimbabwe.

At the heart of CAMFED's success is its commitment to collaboration, humility, and mutual respect. Rather than presenting pre-determined solutions, CAMFED engages government officials, local leaders, and community members as co-creators in designing and implementing the various interventions. The Learner Guide Program continues to serve as a powerful example of this approach, where young women from marginalized backgrounds return to their communities to support the next generation. This model not only addresses immediate educational and societal needs but also builds local leadership capacity, ensuring that these programs are truly community-owned, positioning youth at the centre of solutions creation.

Trust and consistency are also foundational to their work. The organization's willingness to embed its operations within government offices and engage in ongoing dialogue with stakeholders, ensures that its work remains truly responsive and aligned with the broader goals of national education systems. Through its evidence-based approach, CAMFED consistently demonstrates the impact of its interventions, making it easier for governments to invest in and scale these programs. Real-life success stories, such as the Learner Guides who become role models for their communities, provide tangible, visible evidence of the power of education to transform lives.

CAMFED's focus on real solutions contributes to the efforts of governments at national and local level, and the two entities are bound together by their deep commitment towards positive impact in the lives of girls and young women. CAMFED's model of partnering with governments for systems transformation is a testament to the power of partnering practices based on trust and shared ownership. As CAMFED continues to expand and deepen its impact, its commitment to these core principles and the betterment of the lives of girls, young women, especially those who are marginalized, will ensure that its work remains sustainable, scalable, and transformative for generations to come.



The Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) Permanent Secretary, with Education Ministry officials at an exchange visit in a school in Dodoma, Tanzania.

◆ Acknowledgements

This report draws on the insights and contributions of various individuals and entities.

I extend my appreciation to CAMFED for engaging me to undertake this synthesis and analysis. Their commitment to working with humility, respect, and with a deep sense of collaboration is always greatly appreciated. I am grateful to all the government partners, CAMFED staff, and stakeholders in Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe who participated in interviews and consultations. Your willingness to share your experiences and perspectives with candor greatly informed the findings of this report. Additional thanks go to the Altamont Group team, who shared their insights from the work they are doing with CAMFED.

This report reflects the research evidence from the REAL Centre, University of Cambridge, the University, Dar es Salaam and Altamont and the collective efforts of all involved, and I acknowledge your contributions with gratitude.

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CAMFED Tanzania's National Executive Director meets with government officials during a scaling advisory committee regional meeting.



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