



ACFA
Africa Community Foundations Alliance

ROOTED IN AFRICA

African Community Foundations in Practice

*Case Studies on Community Ownership, Local Giving,
Stewardship and Institutional Growth*

AFRICA COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS | PRACTICE CASE STUDIES

PREPARED FOR AFRICA COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS ALLIANCE (ACFA)

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Rooted in Africa | African Community Foundations in Practice

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- Dhamira Moja Community Foundation
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- Nyankanga Community Foundation.

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INTRODUCTION

Across Africa, Community Foundations are taking shape in diverse social, cultural, institutional and philanthropic contexts. Some are long-standing institutions with established systems, grantmaking practices and sustainability mechanisms. Others are emerging organisations still building governance, resource mobilisation, staffing, grantmaking capacity and long-term asset strategies. What connects them is not uniformity, but a shared commitment to community ownership, local accountability, participation, stewardship and community-led development.

Community Foundations are also fundamentally place-based institutions. Their legitimacy is built through commitment to a defined geographic community and through relationships of accountability with the people who live, give, lead and organise in that place.

This publication has been developed as a companion learning product to the Africa Community Foundations Landscape Analysis. The landscape study examined Community Foundation development across Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia, drawing primarily on self-assessment data from participating Community Foundations and complemented by validation consultations, follow-up engagements and organisational documentation. Its findings point to a field that is both diverse and interconnected: rooted in local realities, shaped by different stages of institutional development, and connected by common principles of community philanthropy and locally led development.

The case studies in this publication provide a closer view of practice. They do not rank organisations or present perfect models. They are illustrative country examples drawn from participating Community Foundations. They are not intended to represent the full diversity of Community Foundation practice within each country, but to highlight distinctive characteristics and practices that speak to the wider development of the African Community Foundation movement.

The publication focuses on outstanding characteristics already visible across different contexts and stages of growth. These include community-directed grantmaking, endowment development, stewarding community giving, strategic government engagement, participatory governance, community ownership and traditional leadership for collective action. Each case shows how a particular Community Foundation characteristic is being expressed in practice, while recognising that the organisations themselves remain on different institutional journeys.

This distinction matters. The landscape study shows that Community Foundations in Africa occupy different positions along a continuum of growth, from initiative groups and emerging Community Foundations to more established institutions. Many emerging Community Foundations demonstrate strong local legitimacy, community ownership and innovation while still strengthening organisational systems, predictable financing, staff capacity and grantmaking mechanisms. Emergence should therefore not be read as weakness. It is a dynamic phase of institutional strengthening, in which communities and institutions are learning how to translate local legitimacy into durable civic and philanthropic infrastructure.

The cases also show that the path towards Community Foundation practice is not always linear. In some emerging contexts, Community Foundations may directly implement community priorities while they build local trust, strengthen systems, develop partnerships and create the conditions for grantmaking. This direct implementation is best understood as part of an early institutional

journey, not as the end point of the model. Over time, many organisations are developing pathways towards more catalytic roles: mobilising and stewarding resources, strengthening local groups, convening stakeholders, accompanying community initiatives and investing in community-owned solutions.

Read together, the case studies offer a grounded account of how African Community Foundations are adapting shared principles to local histories, cultures of giving, governance traditions and institutional realities. Their value lies not in showing a single model to replicate, but in revealing how community philanthropy, stewardship and institutional resilience are being built through practice.

Community Foundations in Africa

Community philanthropy is the wider family of practices through which communities give, organise, contribute and care for one another. It includes money, labour, leadership, knowledge, relationships, land, in-kind support, faith-based giving, diaspora contributions and mutual aid. Community Foundations sit within this wider family but represent a more specific institutional form.

A recent ACFA landscape study defines Community Foundations as locally rooted, not-for-profit, public philanthropy institutions that pool charitable contributions into a shared endowment, are governed by a broadly representative local board, and use their resources to make grants and support community development in a defined geographical area, with a view to long-term sustainability and local ownership.

Place is central to this definition. A Community Foundation is not simply an organisation that works on community issues. It is an institution rooted in a defined geographic area, accountable to the people of that place and organised to mobilise and steward resources for their shared benefit. This definition provides an important institutional anchor for the publication. At the same time, the case studies that follow show that Community Foundations in Africa are developing towards this model through different pathways and at different stages of maturity. Some are already practising structured grantmaking, stewarding endowments and managing more established institutional systems. Others are still strengthening governance, local resource mobilisation, community trust, grantmaking capacity and long-term asset development.

For this reason, the publication does not treat Community Foundation identity as a fixed checklist. It reads the cases as examples of practice along a continuum of growth and establishment. In emerging contexts, some Community Foundations may still directly implement community priorities while they build the systems, partnerships and local organisations needed to become more catalytic over time. The longer-term aspiration remains clear: locally owned institutions that mobilise, steward and redistribute resources for community benefit, while building permanence, accountability and community voice.

Methodology and Source Base

This publication draws on the Africa Community Foundations Landscape Analysis, which examined Community Foundation development across Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia. Participating Community Foundations contributed to a self-assessment survey that

captured information on organisational characteristics, governance, community engagement, resource mobilisation, operational models, development stages and institutional priorities. The survey findings informed the landscape analysis and wider synthesis of patterns across the six countries.

The case studies in this publication were developed from that evidence base, complemented by follow-up engagements, written submissions and additional contextual information from selected Community Foundations. The selected cases are illustrative country examples drawn from participating Community Foundations. They are not intended to represent the full diversity of Community Foundation practice within each country, but to highlight distinctive characteristics and practices that speak to the wider development of the African Community Foundation movement.

Because the wider landscape study is based primarily on self-assessment data, the case studies should be read as practice narratives rather than independent evaluations. They document how selected Community Foundations understand, describe and are strengthening their own practice at a particular moment in their institutional development. The emphasis is therefore on learning, reflection and evidence-informed storytelling, not ranking or assessment.

How to Read These Case Studies

Each case study highlights one defining characteristic or practice. The cases should be read as illustrative practice examples from participating Community Foundations within their country contexts. Together, they offer a cross-country view of emerging and established Community Foundation practice, rather than a comprehensive assessment of all Community Foundations in each country.

The seven practices featured are community-directed grantmaking, endowment development and institutional sustainability, stewarding community giving, strategic government engagement, participatory governance, community ownership as institution building, and traditional leadership for collective action.

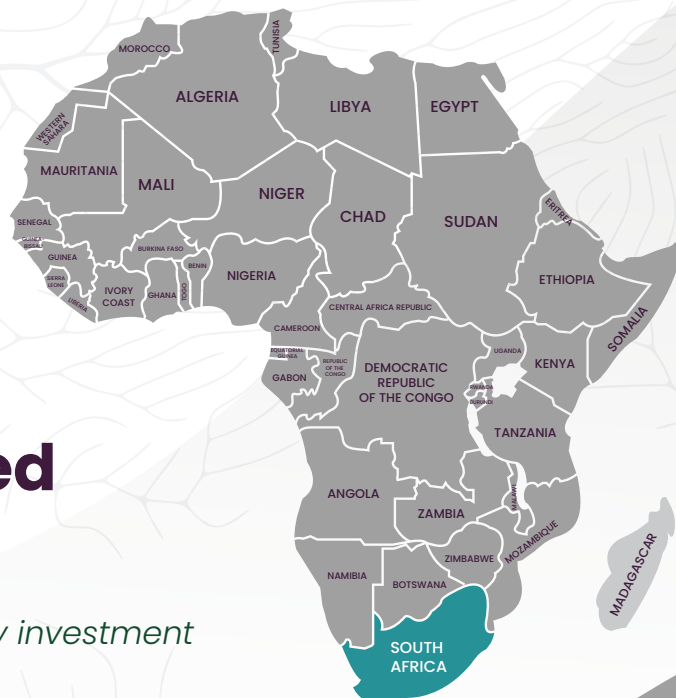
Some of the organisations featured are more established, while others are still emerging. The publication therefore reads the cases as examples of practice along a continuum, not as uniform organisational models. A newer Community Foundation may already demonstrate deep community legitimacy and ownership while still building grantmaking systems or long-term asset strategies. A more established Foundation may have stronger systems and resources while still adapting to changing community and funding contexts.

Direct implementation appears in some cases because emerging Community Foundations may initially respond directly to community priorities while building local trust, systems, partnerships and grantmaking capacity. Over time, many are expected to strengthen their catalytic role through grantmaking, resource stewardship, community asset building and accompaniment of local groups. The cases should therefore be read as practice stories, not fixed classifications.

SOUTH AFRICA

Community-Directed Grantmaking

Turning community voice into community investment



Case Study Snapshot

Country	South Africa
Community Foundation	The Initiative for Community Advancement (ICA)
Location	Bergrivier Municipality, Western Cape
Featured Practice	Community-directed grantmaking
Core Theme	Community voice, participatory decision-making, local resource mobilisation and local stewardship
Key Mechanism	Community Affiliated Funds, community dialogues, local fundraising, independently managed community voting, youth dialogues and a Youth Bank
Learning for the Movement	Grantmaking is strongest when donor funding follows community voice, local contribution and collective decision-making.

Introduction

In the Bergrivier Municipality of South Africa's Western Cape, the Initiative for Community Advancement has built a grantmaking practice that begins before any grant is awarded. Its work starts with listening, local evidence and community decision-making. Through the Eendekuil Community Fund, ICA shows how a Community Foundation can turn community voice into community investment without allowing donor priorities to displace local ownership.

ICA is a place-based Community Foundation that mobilises local resources, strengthens community leadership and builds resilient communities. Its Community Affiliated Funds create a structure through which residents organise around shared priorities, attract additional philanthropic investment and steward resources for their own development. Within this model, grants are not simply distributed to communities; they are directed by communities through transparent and participatory processes.

Practice in Focus

Community-directed grantmaking repositions communities from recipients of funding to architects of local investment. ICA does not begin by asking what donors are willing to fund. It begins by creating legitimate processes through which communities generate evidence, deliberate on priorities, mobilise their own resources and decide where investment should be directed.

This sequence changes the meaning of grantmaking. It becomes more than a mechanism for allocating resources. It becomes a practice of active citizenship, shared stewardship and locally led development. Donor funding enters after communities have identified their priorities and demonstrated ownership of the solutions they wish to pursue.

How the Practice Works

Listening before funding

ICA's grantmaking process begins with community listening. Every two years, the Bergrivier Municipality undertakes the State of the Non-Profit Sector study to understand local development challenges, civil society capacity and emerging community priorities. The findings inform the Municipality's Integrated Development Plan, the planning framework that guides municipal investment and development priorities.

Research alone is not treated as sufficient. The Municipality, in partnership with ICA, convenes community dialogues across the municipality so residents, ward councillors, faith leaders, youth representatives and civil society organisations can test whether the findings reflect lived realities. Young people participate through My Dorp, or My Town, a dedicated dialogue process that gives youth a route into local priority setting.

Through these processes, communities do more than validate research. They shape the development agenda by confirming priorities, identifying emerging concerns and naming issues that may not yet appear in formal municipal planning. Once the Integrated Development Plan identifies the priorities that will receive public investment, ICA asks a different question: what important community priorities remain unaddressed? This allows community philanthropy to complement public investment rather than duplicate it.

Building the Eendekuil Community Fund

The Eendekuil Community Fund, ICA's first place-based Community Affiliated Fund, was created to help residents address issues that had not been prioritised through municipal investment. The Fund did not begin with donor funding. ICA first supported the community to mobilise its own resources and show local commitment.

The launch drew on locally organised fundraising, including a community model show that brought residents together around a shared vision for their town. Community members made financial pledges, the municipality committed additional financial support, and ICA matched a

portion of the resources raised. The sequence was deliberate: community investment came first, philanthropic investment followed.

This approach allowed external support to strengthen, rather than replace, local commitment. It also gave donors and partners a clearer signal that investment would be anchored in community priorities rather than externally designed projects.

From community choice to community investment

Once resources had been mobilised, residents determined how they should be invested. Drawing from earlier consultations, the community identified six priority issues that required attention beyond those addressed in the Integrated Development Plan.

To protect transparency and public confidence, ICA partnered with South Africa's Independent Electoral Commission to oversee a community voting process. Residents of Eendekuil aged twelve years and above were invited to participate. The Electoral Commission independently managed the vote and announced the results, while ICA's role remained that of convener and facilitator.

The community's decision established the priority that would receive investment: Youth and Social Development. ICA then shifted the question from what it wished to support to who within the community was best placed to respond. Because there were no registered non-profit organisations in Eendekuil, the Community Affiliated Fund Committee did not issue an open call for grants. Instead, it facilitated youth dialogues with local stakeholders, which led to the establishment of a Youth Bank. The Youth Bank gives young people a voice and a role in their own development. Seven young leaders are currently being capacitated in the Youth Bank model so that they can mobilise resources and lead responses to the issues young people identify. In this way, the winning priority is being addressed by the young people it was meant to serve.

The remaining priorities identified by residents are largely infrastructural and require greater financial investment than the Fund can currently provide. Rather than set them aside, the Community Affiliated Fund is drawing in the municipality and local companies to address them, keeping community priorities on the public and private investment agenda.

ICA's investment in local capacity also extends well beyond Eendekuil. Across the Bergrivier Municipality, unregistered community-based organisations take part in ICA's six-month capacity enhancement programme. The programme helps them grow into strong, registered non-profit organisations. Through mentoring, accompaniment and institutional development, these groups strengthen their leadership, governance and operational capacity. This builds the local civil society that future community-directed grantmaking will depend on.

What the Practice Made Possible

The Eendekuil Community Fund offers a clear example of how community priorities can become community investment. Residents were involved in identifying what mattered, contributing resources, voting on the priority to be funded and shaping how young people would lead the response through the Youth Bank. Grantmaking became an extension of community decision-making rather than a separate technical process.

ICA has applied the same philosophy across several Community Affiliated Funds. The Dr Somers Education Fund has expanded educational opportunities for learners by combining financial support with mentorship and psychosocial care. The HoopFonds has strengthened organisations

responding to gender-based violence. The Community Rebuilding Fund has supported local entrepreneurs through enterprise development, mentoring and business support. The Bergrivier Youth Fund enables young people themselves to make grantmaking decisions affecting their communities.

Across these funds, financial investment is paired with local leadership, community participation and philanthropic stewardship. The result is not only the movement of money into community priorities, but the strengthening of the civic and organisational infrastructure required to sustain those priorities over time.

What Enabled the Practice

Several conditions made ICA's approach possible. Its alignment with municipal planning processes allows community philanthropy to complement public investment and direct resources towards priorities that communities identify as important but unaddressed. This positioning helps avoid duplication while keeping community voice central to decision-making.

Long-standing relationships with residents, community leaders and civil society organisations have created the trust required for participatory grantmaking. The partnership with the Independent Electoral Commission added credibility to the community voting process and helped safeguard transparency. ICA's insistence on local giving before donor investment also mattered. By demonstrating community ownership through pledges, fundraising and collective action, the Foundation was able to attract additional investment from municipalities, businesses and philanthropic partners without surrendering local priority settings.

The practice also depends on ICA's willingness to invest beyond the grant itself. By accompanying young leaders and unregistered community-based organisations as they build capacity, the Foundation treats community investment as both a response to community priorities and an investment in the people and organisations that will carry those priorities forward.

Learning for the African Community Foundation Movement

ICA's experience shows that community-directed grantmaking begins long before grants are awarded. It begins when communities have the space to generate evidence, deliberate on priorities, mobilise resources and collectively determine where investment should be directed. In this model, donor funding follows community voice rather than directing it.

The practice also reveals that participation must be intentionally built. Communities do not become contributors and decision-makers simply because they are invited to a meeting. Trust is cultivated through repeated engagement, transparent processes, visible accountability and the recognition that residents are not only beneficiaries of development, but stewards of local priorities and resources.

For the African Community Foundation movement, the lesson is precise: the most durable grants are not those that begin with donor priorities. They are those that emerge from communities that have already organised, contributed and collectively decided what matters most. When grantmaking is rooted in local evidence, community contribution and shared decision-making, it becomes more than a financial transaction. It becomes a practice of democratic participation, local stewardship and locally led philanthropy.

SOUTH AFRICA

Endowment Development and Institutional Sustainability

Stewarding a permanent asset for institutional resilience



Case Study Snapshot

Country	South Africa
Community Foundation	Uthungulu Community Foundation
Location	King Cetshwayo District, KwaZulu-Natal
Featured Practice	Endowment development and institutional sustainability
Core Theme	Long-term asset building, governance, financial stewardship and institutional resilience
Key Mechanism	A founding endowment, disciplined access to investment returns, committed board stewardship and professional financial advice
Learning for the Movement	An endowment creates value not simply through the capital it holds, but through the stewardship, governance and institutional discipline that allow it to serve both present needs and future resilience.

Introduction

Established in 1999, Uthungulu Community Foundation is one of South Africa's pioneering Community Foundations. Rooted in KwaZulu-Natal's King Cetshwayo District, it emerged at a time when the Community Foundation model was still largely unfamiliar in the country. The Foundation was created to provide a locally rooted institutional vehicle through which resources could be mobilised and stewarded over the long term.

From the beginning, Uthungulu's founders were concerned with more than what the institution could achieve in the present. They were also thinking about what would enable it to endure. That question shaped one of the Foundation's earliest decisions: to establish a permanent financial asset alongside the organisation itself.

More than two decades later, Uthungulu's experience offers a rare African example of the opportunities and tensions of endowment development. Its story is not simply about growing a fund. It is about the governance, discipline and institutional judgement required to balance immediate organisational needs with responsibility to the future.

Practice in Focus

Endowment development is often treated as the destination of a sustainability strategy: raise the capital, invest it and allow the returns to support the institution. Uthungulu's experience shows that a permanent asset must be continuously governed. Decisions must be made about how it is invested, how much can be accessed and when preserving capital should take precedence over immediate need.

For Uthungulu, the endowment is part of the Foundation's institutional architecture rather than a reserve to be used whenever other funding falls away. The asset is intended to generate continuity, but continuity depends on stewardship. The central practice is therefore not simply holding an endowment. It is protecting the fund's long-term value while keeping it connected to the institution and communities it was created to support.

How the Practice Works

Planting the seed at the point of formation

Uthungulu began with an endowment already in place. At its launch in 1999, the fund stood at approximately R5.1 million. The initial capital was assembled through contributions from several donors, including a matching arrangement in which the Ford Foundation contributed on condition that local corporate partners matched the investment. This brought external philanthropy and local corporate participation into the Foundation's founding financial model.

The significance of this arrangement extended beyond the amount raised. The initial investment recognised that a Community Foundation requires institutional infrastructure capable of outlasting individual projects and grants. Rather than directing all available support towards immediate activity, part of the founding investment was placed in a permanent asset intended to support the Foundation's future.

By April 2026, the endowment stood at approximately R20.5 million. Its growth has taken place alongside the Foundation's use of investment returns to support operations and activities, making the story less about accumulation than about the careful management of an asset over time.

Protecting capital while supporting the institution

The endowment is governed by a deliberate approach to access. Uthungulu works with a maximum annual withdrawal of 5 per cent for operational support, drawn from investment returns rather than the underlying capital. When returns perform strongly, the balance can remain invested and continue to compound.

This creates a practical discipline around a tension familiar to many institutions seeking long-term sustainability. A Foundation may need resources now to maintain staff, sustain operations

or respond to changing conditions, but unrestricted access can erode the very asset designed to provide future resilience. Uthungulu's model seeks to hold both responsibilities in view: use the returns carefully, while protecting the capital base.

Over the years, investment returns have supported operations and activities while the underlying endowment has continued to grow. The value of the endowment therefore cannot be understood simply by looking at its current balance. It must also be understood in relation to what the asset has enabled the institution to sustain along the way.

Stewardship as a governance practice

The endowment has not been sustained by financial rules alone. Uthungulu identifies the dedication of its Board as an important part of its institutional continuity. Long-term asset management requires leadership willing to take responsibility for decisions whose consequences extend beyond a single programme cycle or board term.

Board stewardship is complemented by professional financial advice. A financial advisor provides guidance on how the funds are managed and accessed, adding technical expertise to the Foundation's governance arrangements. This combination matters: institutional leadership provides accountability and strategic judgement, while specialist advice supports decisions that require financial competence.

Uthungulu's experience also reveals that governance quality is inseparable from sustainability. A permanent asset can be weakened by poor decision-making just as readily as by market volatility. The presence of a fund does not remove the need for capable leadership; it makes the quality of leadership more consequential.

A test of resilience

The practical value of the endowment became clearer during periods of disruption. COVID-19 affected the Foundation's access to corporate support as resources were redirected towards pandemic response. Uthungulu was able to draw more heavily on its endowment at a time when other income became less predictable, while remaining cautious about the long-term consequences of overuse.

The experience reinforced a critical distinction between having an endowment and being financially invulnerable. The fund provided a buffer, not immunity. Uthungulu still had to make strategic choices about how to adapt its operating model, remain relevant and manage costs in a changed funding environment.

That period also sharpened the Foundation's understanding of sustainability as a portfolio rather than a single instrument. Alongside the endowment, Uthungulu has explored other approaches to institutional sustainability, including new income streams and arrangements that reduce operational costs. The endowment remains central, but it is not expected to carry the institution alone.

What the Practice Made Possible

The endowment has given Uthungulu a measure of continuity that many emerging Community Foundations struggle to secure. It has provided a long-term asset from which investment returns can support operations and activities, while allowing the Foundation to preserve the underlying capital for future resilience.

It has also shaped institutional behaviour. Because the fund cannot be treated as ordinary income, it has required the Foundation to develop rules, judgement and restraint around access. This discipline has helped keep long-term sustainability visible even when immediate operational needs are pressing.

During periods of disruption, particularly when corporate support became less predictable during COVID-19, the endowment created room for the Foundation to adapt. It did not remove financial pressure, but it provided a buffer and reinforced the importance of building institutions that can withstand uncertainty without abandoning their longer-term purpose.

What Enabled the Practice

Several conditions have enabled Uthungulu to steward its endowment over time. The first was early investment in permanence. Because the endowment was established at launch, long-term sustainability was built into the Foundation's institutional architecture before dependence on short-term funding became entrenched.

The second was responsive founding support. Donors were willing to invest not only in immediate activity, but also in the Foundation's long-term financial base. The matching arrangement connected external philanthropy with local corporate participation, helping to place permanence within a broader partnership model.

Committed governance has also been central. The Board's dedication has provided continuity and stewardship, helping to maintain attention to the long-term purpose of the asset. Professional financial guidance has added technical competence to decisions about investment and access. Together, these conditions have allowed the Foundation to balance present needs with capital preservation.

Finally, the practice has depended on institutional discipline and adaptation. The withdrawal principle provides a framework for restraint, while continued exploration of other income and cost-sharing approaches recognises that sustainability must evolve with changing circumstances.

Learning for the African Community Foundation Movement

Uthungulu's experience suggests that endowment development should not be understood primarily as a fundraising achievement. Raising the capital is only the beginning. The more enduring work lies in building the governance, financial competence and institutional discipline required to steward that capital over time.

The case also offers a useful lesson for emerging Community Foundations: sustainability is easier to build into an institution than to retrofit once financial dependence has become deeply established. Uthungulu's founding endowment gave the organisation a starting asset from which to build, even though the fund itself has required continuous attention and adaptation.

For donors, the experience points to the value of responsive support that looks beyond the life of an individual grant. When part of an investment is directed towards strengthening an institution's long-term financial base, philanthropy can help create infrastructure that continues to serve communities beyond a single funding cycle.

For the wider African Community Foundation movement, the lesson is clear: permanent community assets require more than patient capital. They require patient institutions capable of making decisions for both the present and the future.



GHANA

Stewarding Community Giving

Trust, accountability and locally owned resource mobilisation

Case Study Snapshot

Country	Ghana
Community Foundation	Saboba District Community Foundation
Location	Saboba District, northern Ghana
Featured Practice	Stewarding community giving for sustainable resource mobilisation
Core Theme	Trust, accountability, local giving and community philanthropy
Key Mechanism	Radio accountability, WhatsApp giving networks, public recognition, receipts, appreciation letters and annual giving pledges
Learning for the Movement	Resource mobilisation is strongest when communities trust the institution stewarding their contributions.

Introduction

In Saboba District in northern Ghana, community giving is carried in language, memory and obligation. The local proverb *Teer aado bor*, meaning “Remember your hometown”, speaks both to people who have remained in Saboba and to those who have left: their responsibility to the community continues. The Saboba District Community Foundation builds from the same ethic through its motto, *Titritob*, meaning “Support one another”.

Established in 2022 after community consultations led by local leaders and supported by PureTrust Foundation, SDCF did not set out to import a culture of philanthropy. That culture was already present in mutual aid, family support, faith-based giving and hometown solidarity. The harder task was institutional: how to organise generosity into a transparent, trusted and sustainable system that could finance community priorities beyond moments of emergency.

Practice in Focus

Stewarding community giving means treating resource mobilisation as a relationship of trust rather than a transaction. SDCF does not begin by asking people to give. It begins by strengthening the relationship between the community and the institution responsible for holding, accounting for and directing those resources.

This distinction matters. Many communities already have traditions of giving, but those traditions do not automatically become durable community philanthropy. SDCF's contribution lies in giving generosity form: connecting individual acts of giving to a coordinated system of communication, accountability and local decision-making. In doing so, the Foundation helps community giving become civic infrastructure.

How the Practice Works

Building trust before asking for support

SDCF's fundraising process begins with conversation rather than collection. Before launching an appeal, the Foundation uses Radio Gaakii FM, the district's most accessible communication platform, to explain the issue requiring support, why it matters and how community contributions will be used. In a setting where radio remains a primary source of information for many households, these conversations allow residents to give from an informed position rather than out of obligation. The same discipline continues after resources are mobilised. Foundation representatives return to the radio to account publicly for what was raised, where contributions came from and how funds will be used. Donors who consent to public recognition are acknowledged on air. Every contributor receives a receipt regardless of the size of the gift, and handwritten letters of appreciation are delivered to recognise their support.

Making accountability part of the giving cycle

These practices are modest in form but significant in effect. Communication builds understanding. Transparency builds confidence. Appreciation strengthens relationships. Each campaign becomes part of a cycle of stewardship in which accountability does not close the process. It prepares the ground for the next act of collective giving.

For SDCF, accountability is therefore not a compliance function after fundraising has ended. It is part of the resource mobilisation strategy itself. Residents continue to give when they understand the purpose, see how decisions are made, receive clear feedback and recognise tangible benefits within their own community.

Extending giving through local and digital networks

SDCF has also adapted digital tools to local patterns of association. Crowdfunding campaigns are shared through the Foundation's WhatsApp platform and then circulated through tribal WhatsApp groups, church networks and community associations. Volunteer fundraising coordinators receive contributions through mobile money, while annual giving pledges invite residents to commit regular support to activities identified in the Foundation's work plan.

Contributions ranging from GHS 50 to GHS 500 are treated as meaningful investments in community development. This reinforces the message that everyone has a role in shaping Saboba's future, whether through money, relationships, communication, influence or public trust.

What the Practice Made Possible

The Foundation's approach has enabled community fundraising to support locally prioritised initiatives. In October 2025, SDCF mobilised approximately GHS 12,000 for a district-wide breast cancer awareness and screening campaign. The funds supported screening materials and helped offset transport costs for participants travelling long distances. Hundreds of women were screened and those requiring further treatment were referred, showing how locally mobilised resources can extend access to preventive healthcare.

A second campaign supported a community blood donation exercise for infants and pregnant mothers. The funds covered transport and refreshments for volunteer donors, but the most revealing outcome was not financial. Many participants declined the refreshments, explaining that they had come to give rather than receive. Their decision allowed additional resources to be redirected to mothers and children in need.

Community ownership also shapes how priorities are chosen. When deteriorating conditions at a local health facility threatened service delivery, consultations with traditional leaders, church leaders, Board members and other influential stakeholders helped determine both the priority and the mobilisation strategy. In this model, residents are not only donors to a pre-selected cause. They are part of deciding which issues deserve collective attention and how community resources should be directed.

What Enabled the Practice

Three conditions have enabled SDCF to strengthen local resource mobilisation. The first is a culture of generosity rooted in local identity. The Foundation does not need to convince people that giving matters; it draws on values already woven into community life.

The second is institutional trust. Through regular accountability, visible results and consistent appreciation, SDCF is positioning itself as a credible steward of community resources. Public accountability and recognition have encouraged residents to pledge support even before future campaigns are announced, because they are confident their contributions will be managed responsibly.

The third is volunteer leadership. With no paid staff, SDCF relies on committed volunteers, faith leaders, community representatives and local networks that extend both its reach and its legitimacy. Partnerships with churches, tribal associations and diaspora networks broaden opportunities for giving while keeping ownership close to the community.

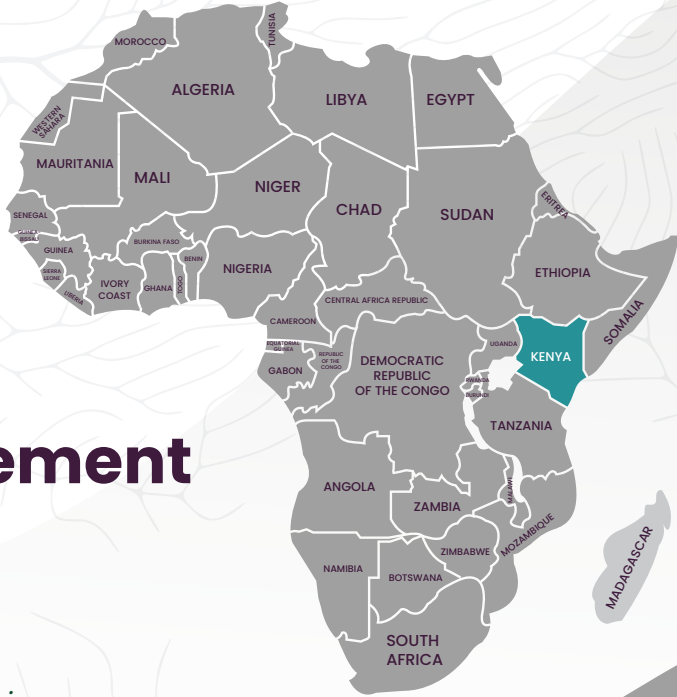
Learning for the African Community Foundation Movement

Saboba's experience offers a practical lesson for Community Foundations across Africa: sustainable resource mobilisation is not simply a technical fundraising function. It is a relationship of trust between communities and the institutions that hold their resources. People continue to give when they understand the purpose, see how decisions are made, receive clear accountability and recognise tangible benefits within their own community.

SDCF's leaders also recognise the limits of campaign-based giving. Generosity can respond to urgent priorities, but it does not by itself guarantee long-term institutional resilience. The Foundation is therefore prioritising the establishment of a community endowment so that future development is not dependent only on continuous appeals. This balance between present needs and permanent community assets is one of the central questions facing Community Foundations across the continent.

In Saboba, accountability is not the end of fundraising. It is the beginning of the next contribution. By recognising every gift, communicating before and after each campaign, and affirming a long-standing culture of solidarity, SDCF is transforming community giving into a locally owned system of resource mobilisation. The case shows that a Community Foundation's greatest asset is not only the money it raises, but the confidence a community places in it to steward generosity for the common good.





KENYA

Government Engagement and Institutional Sustainability

Building public legitimacy through strategic collaboration

Case Study Snapshot

Country	Kenya
Community Foundation	Dhamira Moja Community Foundation
Location	Busia County, Kenya
Featured Practice	Strategic government engagement and collaborative governance
Core Theme	Local legitimacy, institutional sustainability, civic participation and public accountability
Key Mechanism	Communities of practice, relationship-building, formal agreements, policy engagement, civic feedback and cross-sector collaboration
Learning for the Movement	Government engagement can strengthen Community Foundation sustainability when collaboration expands community voice and access to public systems without compromising independence or accountability.

Introduction

In Busia County, Kenya, Dhamira Moja Community Foundation works to strengthen community agency, civic participation and locally led responses to development challenges. Founded in 1999, the Foundation has evolved from a grassroots community organisation into a locally rooted institution working across education, skills development, health and wellness, governance, environmental stewardship and livelihoods.

This evolution has shaped its distinctive approach to government engagement. Rather than treating public institutions as distant stakeholders, Dhamira Moja has invested in sustained relationships with county government, vocational training institutions, civil society and community actors. Through dialogue, formal agreements, policy engagement and structured channels for feedback, it has developed a role that connects citizens with public systems while remaining grounded in community voice and accountability.

The case is not simply about partnership with government. It is about how a Community Foundation builds the credibility to convene, collaborate and influence without losing its civic independence.

Practice in Focus

Dhamira Moja demonstrates how government engagement can become part of a Community Foundation's institutional infrastructure. Its work is not built around a single project or partnership. It is a sustained practice of building trust, creating access and establishing recognised channels through which communities and civil society can engage public institutions.

This practice matters because government decisions, policies, budgets and services directly shape community wellbeing. Dhamira Moja therefore works with public institutions where collaboration can advance community priorities, while also supporting citizens to understand their rights, engage elected leaders and hold public institutions accountable.

How the Practice Works

Convening relationships before formalising them

Dhamira Moja's engagement with government began with relationships rather than agreements. Through the Busia Community of Practice, the Foundation brought together grassroots organisations, community representatives, women, young people, private-sector actors and representatives from government institutions. These encounters created opportunities for dialogue, helped public officials understand the Foundation's role and opened access to information that could strengthen planning and response.

Over time, trust built through repeated interaction created the basis for more structured collaboration. The Community of Practice became local civic infrastructure: a space where actors who might otherwise work separately could meet, exchange information and develop a shared understanding of community priorities.

Creating continuity across changing administrations

The Foundation also recognised the fragility of relationships built only around individual leaders or officials. Governments change, administrations change and institutional memory can be lost. To reduce this risk, Dhamira Moja formalised aspects of its engagement with the Busia County Government through a memorandum of understanding.

The significance of the MoU lies not only in the agreement itself. It provides a starting point for continuity across political transitions, while still requiring the Foundation to build trust with incoming leaders. For a Community Foundation working in a politically dynamic environment, institutional sustainability includes relationships that can survive change.

Connecting community feedback to public decision-making

Dhamira Moja's government engagement is reinforced by its work with citizens. The Foundation supports communities to articulate concerns, understand public processes and hold elected

leaders accountable. Community feedback is carried into engagement with county government through memos and other forms of representation.

This dual role can create tension. The same organisation that sits with government to discuss partnerships also supports citizens to question and demand accountability. Dhamira Moja's experience shows that collaboration does not have to mean silence. Its legitimacy depends on ensuring that engagement with public institutions remains grounded in community voice and purpose.

Turning collaboration into practical pathways

The relationships have produced practical opportunities. In skills development, Dhamira Moja has worked with vocational training institutions to connect young people, young mothers and other underserved groups to training, assessments and certification. Partnerships with other actors have also helped strong-performing participants access start-up kits.

In disaster response, collaboration has helped clarify roles among government, communities and other actors, supporting coordination and reducing duplication. Dhamira Moja has also engaged public institutions around emergency financing, contributing to conversations on whether resources intended for emergency response are directed towards communities facing risks such as flooding.

What the Practice Made Possible

Strategic government engagement has expanded Dhamira Moja's access to information, institutional relationships and public decision-making spaces. The Foundation has become a recognised civil society actor in county processes, creating opportunities for community perspectives to enter discussions on policy, planning, budgeting and development priorities.

The practice has also strengthened the Foundation's ability to connect communities with public systems. Rather than responding to local challenges only through stand-alone projects, Dhamira Moja can work across sectors, refer communities into relevant institutions and help coordinate actors around shared challenges.

Perhaps most importantly, the practice has built local legitimacy alongside institutional recognition. Dhamira Moja's credibility is not simply its organisational reputation. It is earned when communities recognise their participation in the work and see the Foundation as a legitimate bridge between their priorities and the systems that shape local development.

What Enabled the Practice

Several conditions have enabled this approach. Repeated convening created the relationships and trust from which collaboration could grow. The Foundation's credibility within communities gave it a legitimate basis for bringing local concerns into public spaces. Formalising aspects of the relationship through an MoU provided continuity across changing administrations.

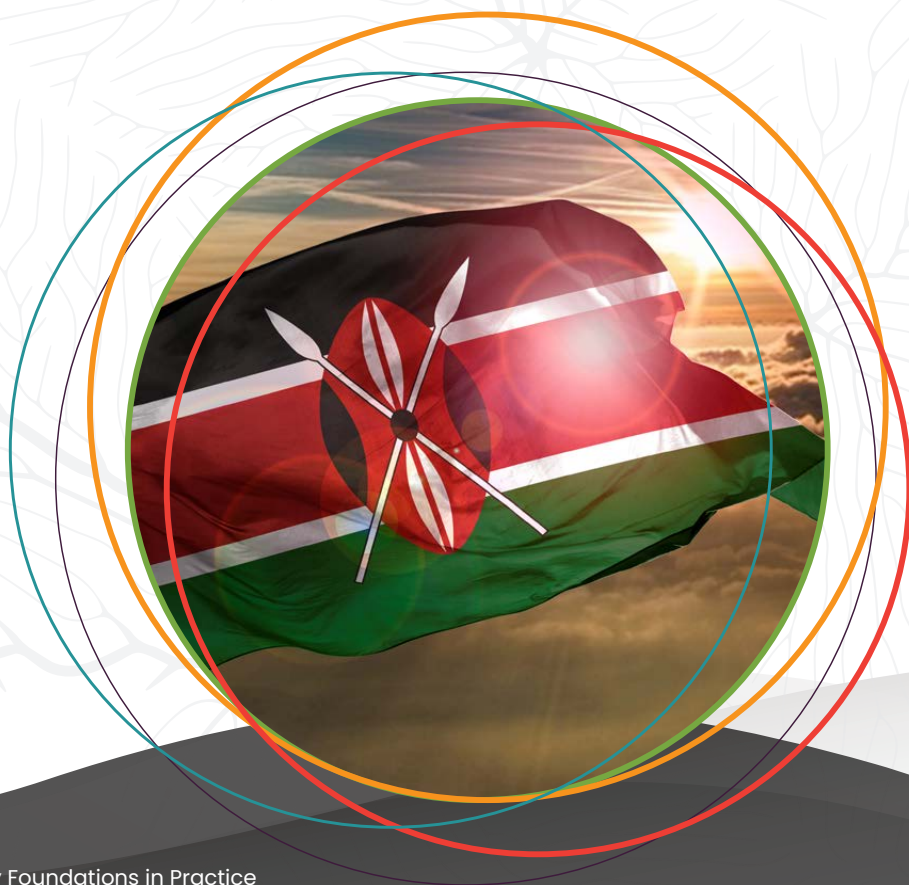
The practice also depends on maintaining a careful balance between partnership and independence. Some civil society actors have questioned whether close government engagement risks compromising autonomy, while civic education and accountability work can create discomfort among government officials. These tensions are not incidental. They are part of the discipline required when a Community Foundation works with power while remaining answerable to communities.

Learning for the African Community Foundation Movement

Dhamira Moja's experience shows that government engagement can be an important dimension of Community Foundation sustainability. Institutional resilience is not built through financial resources alone. It can also be strengthened through trusted relationships, access to information, recognised channels for participation and the ability to carry community priorities into public systems.

The case also offers a caution. Collaboration with government is most valuable when it does not replace accountability to the people a Community Foundation serves. Strategic engagement requires more than signing agreements or attending official meetings. It is built through repeated interaction, clear boundaries, civic legitimacy and a recognised role within the community.

For the African Community Foundation movement, the lesson is clear: credibility is a form of institutional capital. When Community Foundations remain rooted in community voice, they can convene across sectors, collaborate with public institutions, challenge those institutions when necessary and help communities participate in shaping the public systems that influence their futures.



MALAWI

Participatory Governance Rooted in Community

*Luso Langa Community Foundation and the practice
of community-owned decision-making*



Case Study Snapshot

Country	Malawi
Community Foundation	Luso Langa Community Foundation
Location	Chipoka, Traditional Authority Ndindi, Salima District
Featured Practice	Participatory governance rooted in community ownership
Core Theme	Community leadership, participatory decision-making, local resource mobilisation and collective stewardship
Key Mechanism	Community-nominated leadership, monthly community dialogues, participatory priority-setting and community-led resource mobilisation
Learning for the Movement	Governance is strongest when communities help shape leadership, define priorities and steward resources, not only when they are consulted after decisions are made.

Introduction

In Chipoka, under Traditional Authority Ndindi in Malawi's Salima District, Luso Langa Community Foundation works across 17 villages along the shores of Lake Malawi. The area is shaped by fishing, small-scale farming and informal enterprise, while migration among young people and men has left many households relying heavily on women, local leaders and community networks for continuity and care.

Luso Langa's response has been to treat governance not as a boardroom function, but as a lived community practice. Since its transition from a youth-led organisation into a legally registered Community Foundation in 2023, with technical accompaniment from Mudzi Connect, the Foundation has sought to organise local leadership, community voice and shared resources into a more accountable institution for locally led development.

Practice in Focus

Participatory governance at Luso Langa begins before programmes are designed or projects are implemented. It begins when communities recommend leaders, shape priorities, gather in dialogue and help determine how resources should be mobilised and used. The Foundation's role is therefore less about controlling decisions and more about convening the conditions through which communities can exercise ownership.

This represents a deliberate shift from doing development for communities towards stewarding development with them. Communities are treated not only as participants in activities, but as holders of knowledge, leadership, relationships and assets that can shape the institution itself.

How the Practice Works

Leadership chosen through community trust

One of the most significant changes in Luso Langa's transition was the redesign of its governance structures. Previously, the Board was largely made up of technical professionals from outside the immediate community. While technically competent, it did not fully reflect the voices and aspirations of the communities the organisation served.

The Community Foundation transition prompted a different question: who should govern an institution that belongs to the community? Luso Langa invited community members to recommend individuals they trusted to steward the Foundation's future. Community members nominated respected local leaders, business owners, people with educational and professional experience, and individuals able to convene political leaders and open opportunities for collaboration. Dialogue that sets the agenda

Participatory governance extends beyond the Board. Each month, community members gather at the Traditional Authority's court for open dialogues convened through existing traditional leadership structures. These meetings bring together representatives from the Area Development Committee, Community Executive Committee, religious institutions, political leaders and community members.

The Foundation does not arrive with a fixed agenda. Discussions are shaped by the issues communities consider most urgent at that moment. Luso Langa listens, facilitates dialogue and leaves with action points that inform its future work. In this practice, the Foundation does not bring an agenda to the community. It leaves the community with one.

From direct implementation to community stewardship

The same philosophy shapes how Luso Langa approaches projects. Community consultations precede project design, ensuring that interventions respond to locally identified priorities. The Foundation is also increasingly moving towards enabling local groups to lead and steward their own initiatives, including through sub-granting where appropriate. This shift matters for the Community Foundation model: many emerging foundations begin by implementing projects

directly, but institutional maturity requires them to strengthen local groups, organise resources and create pathways for communities themselves to act.

Community philanthropy in practice

The restoration of the Chipoka Health Centre signpost shows how this approach becomes visible. The need emerged after two ambulances transporting patients could not locate the health centre because there was no clear sign from the main road. The risk was serious: if drivers missed the turn, the road continued towards Lake Malawi.

Luso Langa initiated a community fundraising campaign through WhatsApp. Community members, traditional leaders, the Chipoka diaspora and school-going children contributed. A local artisan volunteered his labour to construct and paint the signpost, asking only that the Foundation provide the bricks and paint. The project became more than a signpost. It showed how money, labour, skills, relationships and influence can all become philanthropic assets when communities own the purpose.

What the Practice Made Possible

Luso Langa's practice has made governance more visible and more meaningful to the community. Leadership is no longer appointed only on behalf of residents. It is shaped through their confidence and trust. Community dialogues have created a regular pathway through which local priorities can surface, be discussed and inform the Foundation's work.

The practice has also strengthened local resource mobilisation. The Chipoka Health Centre signpost demonstrated that communities can respond quickly to an urgent need when they understand the purpose, trust the institution convening them and can contribute according to the assets they possess. Participation became stewardship, and stewardship became a practical expression of community ownership.

What Enabled the Practice

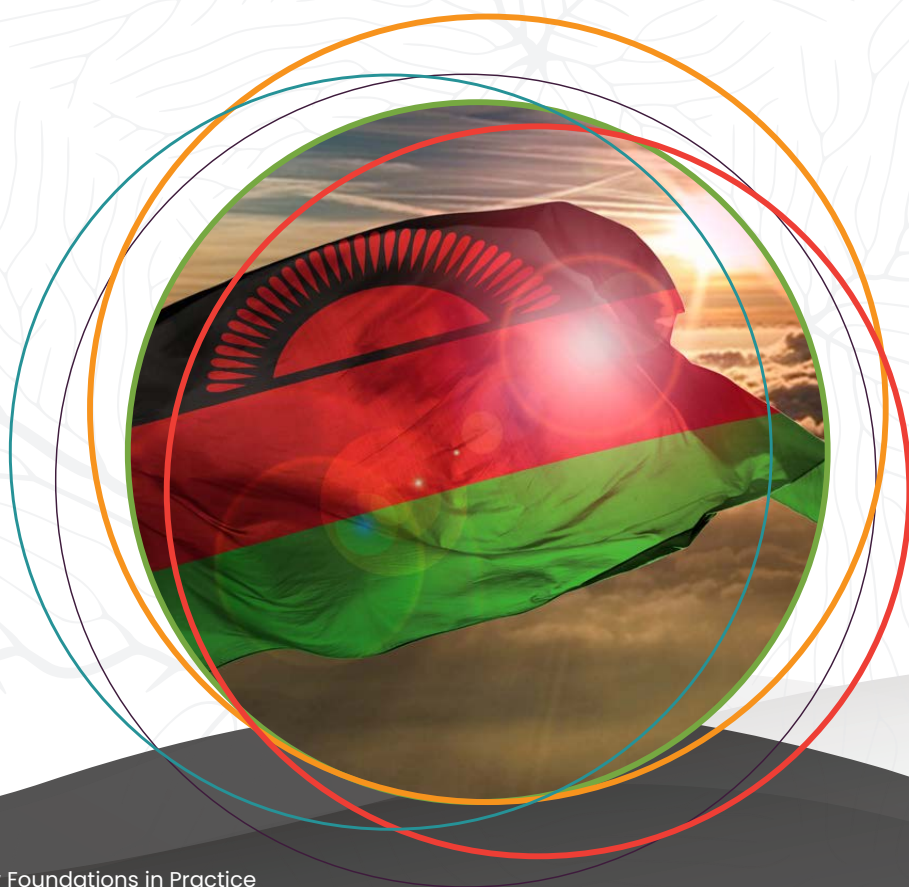
Several conditions have enabled Luso Langa's approach. Technical accompaniment from Mudzi Connect supported the transition into the Community Foundation model and reinforced the importance of community-led leadership and accountability. The Foundation also chose to build on existing community institutions rather than create parallel systems.

Traditional leaders, Area Development Committees, religious institutions, community volunteers, youth groups, women's groups and members of the Chipoka diaspora all form part of an ecosystem of shared leadership. Underlying these relationships is a belief that communities already possess assets that can shape their own development. Governance, in this sense, becomes less about control and more about organising community knowledge, leadership and solidarity around shared priorities.

Learning for the African Community Foundation Movement

Luso Langa's experience shows that participatory governance is not achieved simply by creating representative structures or consulting communities before projects begin. It is cultivated through continuous opportunities for communities to shape leadership, define priorities, steward resources and hold institutions accountable.

For the wider African Community Foundation movement, the lesson is clear: governance is strongest when it is rooted not only in organisational structures, but in relationships of trust, shared responsibility and collective stewardship. When communities are trusted to help shape the institution, governance becomes more than a principle of good management. It becomes the foundation for resilient, accountable and community-owned philanthropy.



UGANDA

Building Ownership Before Building Programmes

Ethur Community Foundation and the practice of community-owned institution building



Case Study Snapshot

Country	Uganda
Community Foundation	Ethur Community Foundation
Location	Abim District, Karamoja Sub-region
Featured Practice	Place-based community ownership as institution building
Core Theme	Locally led development, community identity, participatory governance and local resource mobilisation
Key Mechanism	Community naming, community-recommended leadership, a Community Development Fund and the Abim Impact Marathon
Learning for the Movement	Resilient Community Foundations are built with communities from the beginning, not for communities after decisions have been made.

Introduction

In Abim District, in Uganda's Karamoja Sub-region, Ethur Community Foundation is building a local institution by beginning with a simple but demanding principle: a Community Foundation must belong to the community before it can credibly serve it. Established in 2025 after participation in the Community Foundation Incubation Programme facilitated by CivSource Africa, Ethur emerged in a context where communities had experienced decades of humanitarian and development assistance, but where traditions of volunteerism, mutual support, informal giving and collective responsibility remained strong.

The Foundation was not created to replace these traditions. It was established to organise, strengthen and steward them through an institution shaped by the people of Abim themselves. In Ethur's experience, community ownership is not a programme feature added after priorities have been set. It is the foundation on which legitimacy, leadership, resource mobilisation and future grantmaking are being built.

Practice in Focus

Community ownership is often reduced to consultation or participation in pre-designed activities. Ethur offers a deeper interpretation. The founding question was not only how residents could take part in the Foundation's work, but how the Foundation itself could belong to the community from the beginning.

That question shaped the earliest decisions. Because the Community Foundation model was still unfamiliar in Uganda, the founding team worked through trusted community mobilisers to introduce the concept across Abim. These conversations explained how Community Foundations differ from conventional NGOs, with an emphasis on local ownership, shared responsibility and community-led philanthropy. They also invited residents to advise on how such an institution should be established, who should be involved and what identity it should carry.

How the Practice Works

Beginning with identity

One of Ethur's first acts of institution building was to invite the community to name the Foundation. Community members proposed several names, narrowed them through dialogue and then voted on their preferred choice. The selected name, Ethur, carries local significance. The people of Abim are collectively known as Ethur, and the area is often referred to locally as Ethur Land.

The naming process did more than produce an organisational identity. It made the Foundation's first public decision a collective one. By choosing a name that residents recognised as their own, the community affirmed that the Foundation did not belong to a donor, project or external organisation. It belonged to the people of Abim.

Leadership shaped by community trust

The same approach guided the formation of the Board. Community members were invited to recommend people they believed had the integrity, commitment and relationships needed to steward the Foundation's future. Many initial nominations included individuals who had served on NGO boards. While their experience was respected, Ethur recognised that conventional NGO practice often assumes that priorities are defined elsewhere and then implemented locally.

The Foundation therefore selected leaders who showed an appreciation for local philanthropy, community ownership and shared leadership. The Board was also strengthened by individuals with experience in grantmaking and philanthropy, allowing the institution to combine local legitimacy with strategic guidance. A Community Advisory Committee is being established to ensure community voices continue to inform decision-making and organisational direction.

From contribution to a Community Development Fund

Ethur's approach to resource mobilisation followed the same logic. Rather than waiting for external funding, the Foundation established a Community Development Fund to support priorities identified by community members. The Fund began with one act of local generosity. After learning

about the Foundation's vision, an early supporter proposed creating a locally owned fund through which the people of Abim could collectively respond to their own priorities. She became its first contributor.

Additional members of the wider community have since contributed, with each donation helping to build a resource owned by the community. Although still at an early stage, the Fund signals a shift from dependence on external assistance towards community investment in locally determined solutions. It also lays the groundwork for future community grantmaking, through which locally mobilised resources can be reinvested in priorities identified by residents themselves.

Collective action through the Abim Impact Marathon

The Foundation's first major fundraising initiative showed how ownership can move from institutional design into collective action. The idea for the Abim Impact Marathon came from a member of the Abim diaspora who had a long-standing interest in promoting maternal health while showcasing Abim's tourism potential. Having followed Ethur's work and its focus on advancing local philanthropy, he reached out to the Foundation with the idea and invited Ethur to join and partner in the initiative. Recognizing the alignment with its vision of locally led philanthropy and community investment, Ethur joined the cause. The inaugural Abim Impact Marathon was subsequently organized through this partnership.

More than one hundred participants took part. Community members bought marathon kits, with proceeds used to purchase maternal health kits for expectant mothers in Abim Hospital as well as fuel vouchers for the hospital ambulance. Local partnerships quickly formed. Rotary members joined the initiative, DFCU Bank supported the event and Abim Secondary School provided its grounds. Residents contributed not only money, but ideas, coordination, volunteer time and relationships. The marathon showed that communities are more willing to invest in solutions when they identify with the initiative and the institutions leading it.

What the Practice Made Possible

Ethur's early evidence of ownership appears in the sequence of decisions that shaped the Foundation. The community selected its name. Residents recommended its governing Board. A local woman initiated the Community Development Fund. A diaspora member inspired one of its first fundraising initiatives. More than one hundred people participated in the Abim Impact Marathon, supported by local businesses, educational institutions, Rotary and volunteers.

Together, these actions show that ownership is more than attendance at meetings or participation in activities. Communities helped shape Ethur's identity, governance, resources and early public practice. This matters for the Community Foundation model because legitimacy cannot be manufactured after an institution is formed. It is built through decisions that give communities real influence over what the institution becomes.

What Enabled the Practice

Several conditions made Ethur's approach possible. The Community Foundation Incubation Programme provided a structured pathway for introducing the model while keeping community ownership central. Trusted community mobilisers helped translate a relatively unfamiliar institutional idea into language, relationships and processes that residents could recognise and engage with.

Ethur also built upon existing community assets rather than treating Abim as a place of need alone. Traditions of volunteerism, mutual support, informal giving and collective responsibility created a foundation for local philanthropy. The community's shared identity as Ethur gave the Foundation a name and meaning rooted in place. Diaspora connections, local institutions, Rotary members, DFCU Bank, Abim Secondary School and volunteers widened the circle of support around early initiatives.

Strategic guidance also mattered. By combining community-recommended leadership with people who understand grantmaking and philanthropy, Ethur began to build an institution that could hold both local legitimacy and technical direction. Ownership gives the institution its mandate, while institutional capacity helps it steward that mandate responsibly.

Learning for the African Community Foundation Movement

Ethur's experience suggests that community ownership is not simply an outcome of Community Foundation development. It is a starting point. Ownership is cultivated before programmes are implemented, when communities influence the decisions that shape an institution's identity, leadership, governance and resources. In this process, participation becomes stewardship, and stewardship becomes a source of legitimacy, trust and institutional resilience.

The Foundation's work remains at an early stage. Introducing a new institutional model in communities accustomed to externally driven development requires patience and a gradual shift in mindset. Encouraging residents to see themselves not only as recipients of development, but also as contributors, investors and decision-makers, is an ongoing process. Building a culture of local giving similarly requires time as the Foundation continues to demonstrate the value of collective investment in shared priorities.

For the wider African Community Foundation movement, Ethur offers a clear lesson: resilient Community Foundations are not built for communities. They are built with communities from the beginning. When people are trusted to shape the institutions that serve them, ownership becomes more than participation. It becomes the basis for locally rooted philanthropy, accountable leadership and durable civic infrastructure.



ZAMBIA

When Local Leadership Mobilises Collective Action

The Nyankanga Community Foundation story



Case Study Snapshot

Country	Zambia
Community Foundation	Nyankanga Community Foundation
Location	Five traditional headmen's villages: Senior Headman Muntemba, Hamanjanji, Ngweende, Mboloma and Sivuwa
Featured Practice	Traditional leadership and collective action
Core Theme	Community leadership, participation, local resource mobilisation and collective action
Key Mechanism	Traditional headmen, village-level dialogue, community contributions and locally mobilised resources
Learning for the Movement	Traditional leadership can serve as social infrastructure for collective action when Community Foundations work through trusted local structures rather than around them.

Introduction

Nyankanga Community Foundation was established in 2019 by the local community with support from the Zambia Governance Foundation (ZGF). It works across five traditional headmen's villages: Senior Headman Muntemba, Hamanjanji, Ngweende, Mboloma and Sivuwa. Its purpose is to strengthen community capacity to manage and improve local livelihoods.

The Foundation was created around a philosophy of inclusion. Its 20-member structure represents women, youth and people with disabilities, alongside sectors including education, health, environment and natural resource management, the church and social welfare. This formal structure works alongside village and sector committees that support community development. What makes Nyankanga distinctive is the way it uses traditional leadership as civic infrastructure. Much of its mobilisation happens through the social fabric of community life: headmen, churches, funerals, weddings, football games and other spaces where people already gather. In this setting, headmen are not simply symbolic figures or project endorsers. They help convene residents, legitimise community decisions, organise contributions and turn shared concerns into collective action.

Practice in Focus

Nyankanga's practice centres on traditional leadership and collective action. The Foundation works through existing structures of trust and authority rather than creating parallel systems for participation. Traditional leaders help bring people together, support deliberation, communicate priorities and mobilise contributions. Village and sector committees provide additional channels through which residents can participate and follow through on collective decisions.

The approach is grounded in a simple principle: development projects should be community led. This is expressed not only through financial contributions, but through labour, materials, land, time, social influence and relationships. In Nyankanga's experience, these forms of contribution become philanthropic assets when they are organised around priorities that communities themselves have chosen.

How the Practice Works

Communities decide what matters

In 2019, Nyankanga and ZGF convened community members at Nyankanga Primary School to identify challenges across the five-village catchment. Residents identified poor roads, the absence of a clinic, lack of a hammer mill, inadequate desks and unsafe drinking water. They were then asked to select the most urgent priorities. Three were chosen: desks, a hammer mill and a hand pump.

This process established an important principle for the Foundation's work. Community members were not simply being consulted after decisions had been made elsewhere. They participated in naming what mattered, ranking priorities and shaping the basis for local resource mobilisation.

Headmen turn agreement into action

The hammer mill initiative shows how traditional leadership can move a community decision from discussion to practical commitment. Residents across the five villages had been travelling approximately 15 to 25 kilometres to access an electrically powered hammer mill. Through meetings convened by headmen in their respective villages, community members discussed the challenge and collectively identified the hammer mill as the most urgent priority.

Once the decision was made, the headmen helped translate a shared priority into village-level obligations. Each village committed to producing 500 bricks. Community members volunteered their labour, contributed towards cement and provided river sand, building sand, iron sheets and roofing nails. The Senior Headman of Muntemba provided the land for the facility.

External support complemented this local effort. ZGF purchased the hammer mill for K48,000 and a dehuller for K49,450, a combined contribution of K97,450. Traditional leaders, together with the Foundation, continue to supervise the running of the project. The result is therefore more than equipment delivered to the community. It is a shared asset shaped by collective decision-making, traditional leadership and multiple forms of local contribution.

Visible needs become shared responsibility

The school desk initiative illustrates a second pathway through which leadership and participation came together. The Foundation found children studying without adequate desks, in some cases sitting on the ground. It convened a meeting involving the school and community, then mobilised young people to raise awareness and encourage participation.

The original plan was for 145 desks, with the community contributing 25 percent and ZGF 75 percent. Each village received a fundraising target, with the initiative supported by the five traditional leaders. The community raised K27,740 and contributed 69 desks; ZGF contributed a further 75 desks, bringing the total to 144.

The process shows how a visible community need can become a shared obligation when trusted leaders and community structures help organise participation. External funding added value, but it did not replace community contribution or decision-making.

Collective action beyond individual projects

The same pattern extends beyond the hammer mill and school desks. Nyankanga reports that the community has also mobilised around a hand pump providing water at the school, nine teacher houses and learner toilets, and a poultry enterprise of 155 layer chickens. Across these initiatives, village headmen and community structures have helped coordinate local contributions and participation.

This suggests that the Foundation's role is less about becoming the sole provider of solutions and more about facilitating collective responses through relationships and capacities that already exist within the community. Traditional leadership gives those relationships a recognised channel through which people can gather, deliberate and act.

What the Practice Made Possible

Nyankanga's practice made it possible for community priorities to become community-owned assets. The hammer mill brought a service closer to residents who previously travelled long distances to access it. The desk initiative helped move children from studying on the ground to learning with adequate desks. The hand pump and other community-led projects addressed additional local needs.

More importantly, the process strengthened ownership. Repeated experiences of contributing labour, materials, money and land helped demonstrate that community members are not only beneficiaries of development. They are resource holders, decision-makers and actors in their own development. External partners can add value, but the legitimacy of the work comes from community participation and local leadership.

What Enabled the Practice

Several conditions made Nyankanga's approach possible. The first is the legitimacy of traditional

leadership. When a headman calls a meeting, community members are more likely to attend because the invitation comes through a trusted authority rooted in local life. That legitimacy helps turn a conversation about a shared concern into practical commitments.

The second is the Foundation's decision to work through existing community structures rather than around them. Headmen, village committees, sector committees, churches and everyday community gatherings provide the social channels through which priorities are discussed and contributions are organised. These structures connect formal Community Foundation processes to the places where community trust already exists.

The third is the visible nature of the priorities themselves. A hammer mill, desks, water points and teacher houses are concrete needs that residents can understand and rally around. When the need is visible and the process is locally led, contribution becomes easier to organise.

The practice also carries an important lesson about dependence on individual leaders. Headmen have competing responsibilities and cannot always attend meetings. When a headman is absent, participation can weaken because people may be less inclined to engage without a trusted convenor. For Nyankanga, the strength of traditional leadership therefore needs to be complemented by wider participation through village committees, sector structures, youth, women and other community constituencies.

Learning for the African Community Foundation Movement

Nyankanga's experience shows that traditional leadership can be a powerful source of civic infrastructure for Community Foundations. In communities where headmen carry trust, authority and convening power, they can help Foundations move from consultation to commitment. They can make participation visible, translate community priorities into village-level obligations and help sustain collective action across households and villages.

The case also shows that local resource mobilisation is not only about money. Labour, land, materials, time, social influence and relationships can all become philanthropic resources when communities own the purpose. A Community Foundation's work is therefore not limited to raising funds. It can also organise the relationships through which people decide what matters and what they are willing to contribute.

For the wider African Community Foundation movement, Nyankanga offers a grounded lesson: local philanthropy does not always begin with a fundraising campaign. It can begin when trusted local leaders bring people together to deliberate, when communities define their own priorities and when residents decide what they can contribute to build the response themselves. The task for Community Foundations is to work with these forms of local authority while building broad ownership that can endure beyond any single leader, project or funding cycle.

CONCLUDING LEARNING SYNTHESIS

Taken together, these cases show a movement that is still developing, but already rich in practice. The Community Foundations featured here are not identical in maturity, function or institutional form. Some are established and grantmaking-oriented, some are emerging, and some are still building the systems needed to become more catalytic. Yet across the cases, several lessons recur.

1. Place-based legitimacy is the foundation of Community Foundation development.

Across the cases, legitimacy is built through proximity to a defined place and accountability to the people who live, give, lead and organise there. ICA places community decision-making before grantmaking. Ethur begins institution building with community naming, shared identity and community-recommended leadership in Abim. Luso Langa uses community dialogues and community-nominated governance. Nyankanga works through trusted headmen and village structures. These practices show that Community Foundations derive their authority not only from registration or technical capacity, but from being recognised by communities as institutions that exist for their place, listen, account and respond.

2. Local giving is both a resource strategy and a trust-building practice.

Saboba shows that local giving becomes more durable when it is stewarded through communication, accountability and appreciation. Ethur and Luso Langa show that local contributions can begin modestly, through community funds, WhatsApp campaigns, labour, skills and relationships. Across the cases, community philanthropy is not simply about raising money. It is a way of strengthening belonging, confidence and collective responsibility.

3. Governance is strongest when it is rooted in community voice.

The cases challenge narrow understandings of governance as compliance. Governance becomes a source of legitimacy when communities help shape leadership, define priorities and hold institutions accountable. Luso Langa's community-nominated leadership, Ethur's community-recommended Board, ICA's community voting process and Nyankanga's use of traditional leadership all show that governance in Community Foundations must be both institutional and relational.

4. Partnerships matter when they strengthen community agency.

Several cases show the value of partnerships with public institutions, donors, businesses, churches, schools, traditional authorities and diaspora networks. The strongest partnerships do not displace community voice. They widen the circle of resources available to communities while keeping decision-making grounded locally. Dhamira Moja's government engagement, ICA's alignment with municipal planning and Uthungulu's founding endowment partnerships each show different ways partnerships can build institutional resilience when linked to accountability and purpose.

5. Grantmaking is an aspiration, but pathways into grantmaking vary.

The landscape study shows that grantmaking remains central to Community Foundation identity, but not all organisations are at the same stage. ICA demonstrates a more established practice of community-directed grantmaking. Ethur is building a Community Development Fund that lays groundwork for future grantmaking. Luso Langa is moving towards enabling local groups to steward resources directly. These examples suggest that grantmaking capacity develops through trust, systems, governance, community ownership and resources, not through organisational intention alone.

6. Emerging Community Foundations may implement directly while becoming more catalytic.

In several contexts, direct implementation reflects community demand, limited local institutional capacity and the practical realities of early-stage development. This should not be treated as a failure of the model. The more important question is whether implementation builds community ownership, strengthens local groups and creates pathways towards resource stewardship, grantmaking and accompaniment. The cases show emerging Foundations learning to move from doing work for communities towards organising conditions through which communities can act for themselves.

7. Permanent community assets require patient institutions, not only patient capital.

Uthungulu's endowment illustrates the importance of permanence, but also the discipline required to steward it. Saboba's interest in a community endowment, Ethur's Community Development Fund and ICA's Community Affiliated Funds all point to a broader aspiration: building resources that outlast a single project, donor or leadership moment. Permanent assets matter because they give communities a base from which to plan, respond and invest over time.

8. The African Community Foundation movement is diverse but connected by shared principles.

The cases are different because the contexts are different. Ghana's organised giving, Kenya's public systems engagement, Malawi's participatory governance, Uganda's institution-building, Zambia's traditional leadership and South Africa's grantmaking and endowment practice reflect distinct local realities. Yet they are connected by common commitments to community ownership, local accountability, stewardship, participation and long-term community benefit. The movement's strength lies in this combination of shared identity and locally grounded expression.

Closing Reflection

These case studies reveal a field coming into clearer view. African Community Foundations are not developing through one uniform pathway. They are being shaped by local histories, cultures of giving, governance traditions, leadership structures, funding environments and community aspirations. Some are building permanent assets. Some are strengthening community-directed grantmaking. Some are organising local giving, traditional leadership, citizen voice or participatory governance. All are working through the difficult and necessary task of turning local legitimacy into durable institutions.

The future of the movement will depend on continued investment in community ownership, institutional capacity, grantmaking systems, local resource mobilisation, ecosystem support and long-term sustainability. It will also depend on patience: patience with institutions that are emerging, patience with communities learning to see themselves as resource holders, and patience with the work of building civic infrastructure that can outlast individual leaders, projects and funding cycles.

The lesson from these cases is not that every Community Foundation should look the same. It is that strong Community Foundations combine shared principles with locally grounded practice. Their promise lies in the ability to mobilise what communities already know, give, lead and steward, and to organise those assets into institutions capable of serving community priorities over time.

