Peace emanates outwards: Education and belonging as foundations for global peace

Angeline Murimirwa, CEO, CAMFED.

November 3, 2026.

I want to start by saying thank you to everyone at the Seoul Peace Prize Cultural Foundation once again for honoring CAMFED, the Campaign for Female Education, and me with the 2026 Seoul Peace Prize, and for inviting me to speak to a new generation of communicators here at Korea University.



To my CAMFED Association sister Fiona Mavhinga, who accepted the Seoul Peace Prize on behalf of CAMFED yesterday: Thank you for travelling with me not just this week, but over nearly 30 years. I couldn't have made this journey without your friendship, soaring intellect, and extraordinary commitment to our sisterhood, and to the future we imagine: for ourselves, our communities, and for the Africa we love.

To all the media and communications students here at the University of Korea: Thank you so much for making the time to join me in person. It's a great honor and responsibility to use your voice to amplify those of others, or to interpret for your audiences the news and events happening around us.

A teacher once said that everything in the world has already been said — our job is to find a new way of saying it. I hope I can find enough new words in my non-native language to bring a different perspective into your lives today.

But before I begin, Fiona and I want to invite some of our sisters in the CAMFED Association - the network of women leaders educated with CAMFED support - into the room with us. So let's hear from them as we introduce you to CAMFED, the Campaign for Female Education.

Video available to watch at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0KP4Z8zq_E



Today I want to speak to you about education and belonging: why they matter, and how they become the foundations for peace.

All the women you just heard from have a key part of our story in common: All of us wanted an education, but it felt desperately out of reach.

The circumstances we were born into meant we simply lacked the funds to go to school. Poverty undermined our hard-working families and their ambitions. We knew what hunger felt like, and we experienced all those additional hurdles that get in the way of a girl's education: long and dangerous journeys to school; the need to take up caring and household duties at home; the lack of the school uniform, notebooks or menstrual products required to attend class; the dearth of female teachers when you got there; and even the lack of suitable bathroom facilities for girls at school. In our villages, we also didn't have any relatable role models in professions, business or leadership. It was hard to imagine a different future.

The stark statistic is that up to 95% of the most disadvantaged girls in rural Africa never complete their high school education. Imagine, for a second, what it would have meant in your own life if your basic education was taken away from you, and with it, the dreams and ambitions that brought you to this university.



When a child is excluded from education due to poverty, what she takes away is that she is not important, that she doesn't deserve to develop herself, that she doesn't belong. It's a form of rejection that creates deep and lasting scars.

A girl excluded from school becomes a woman excluded from decision-making at every level. The child marriage and early motherhood that inevitably follow are not a form of belonging — they are a form of abuse that plays out in continued cycles of poverty and powerlessness. This is not what parents want for their children. I've never met a parent that doesn't want better for their sons and daughters. But when the structures around you fail you, when you can't see a choice, you will resign to coping in ways that focus on surviving, not thriving.

I want to talk about the dangers of stories told from a place of exclusion.

The stories we tell can bring order to chaos, meaning to our exclusion, and provide explanations of the injustices we feel are all around us. They can help us make sense of the world. Conversely, they can inflict immeasurable harm.

Many of the stories that cause harm are stories of blame and shame. We see this across different media every day, focusing on the question: "What's wrong with the world and who's to blame?"

We human beings don't like unpredictability or uncertainty. Things we don't understand or can't control make us fearful. And once we're fearful, we'll believe the narratives that pit "us" against "them".

These narratives invite us to see the world as binary, to pick a side, and fight. They remove our desire to listen, empathize, understand, and do the complex work of

connection and community-building. Cultures of blame and shame are fertile ground for division and extremism.

Globally, this can create a toxic form of belonging that needs an enemy to survive. It feeds on power over others; it feeds on ego; and it foments instability and war. The resulting unravelling of the social fabric in societies all over the world is having perilous consequences as I speak.

In the education development sector, the blame and shame narratives we often hear pit a girl against her family. They speak of families forcing girls to get married young, rather than examining how poverty, hunger, and deep structural inequalities mean families are forced to make painful decisions in the name of survival — choices no one should ever have to make.

We also hear stories of blame directed at girls who get pregnant or drop out of school. The issues of poverty, exploitation and lack of hope for a different future are real, but it's not the survivor of structural inequality that is at fault. When girls are pushed out of school, it is society that has failed them, and it is our job to make it right, and to tell that story responsibly, not in a reductionist way.

Our education tells us that change is possible. Education unlocks agency and purpose. It gives us the tools to examine and embrace complexity, create healthy ways of belonging, and transform systems to secure every child's right to learn and thrive.

So I invite all of you to reframe your stories the way our movement does. We ask: "What's right with the world, and how do we build on that together?"



On my beautiful continent we say: It's all about ubuntu, thriving together.

The Southern African concept of ubuntu means, 'I am because we are' - and recognizes

that all of humanity is interconnected, and that I can't be truly at peace when others are struggling. Peace emanates outwards. It starts with our own way of being, and the way we connect within our families and communities. And it is a never-ending process which we neglect at our peril.

Every day we understand more about the intricacies of our bodies - that the interplay of our environment, our organs and our brain is finely tuned and highly complex. Science tells us again and again that the ecosystem is just that - a system - with interdependent parts that all have their role to play. And if you disrupt any one of them, the system can fail. When a system is broken - or a body is sick - we know it's a whole raft of interventions, both physical and psycho-social, that are needed to restore health and wellbeing.

That analogy holds true in every society. We know that you can't transform lives without transforming the systems and structures that hold people back, that exclude and alienate. Only a holistic approach will make a long-term difference.

There is a reason why educational, health and economic outcomes are significantly diminished in marginalized communities deprived of nutritious food, a clean environment, a safe childhood, quality education, economic opportunity, financial security, and the resulting confidence and agency with which individuals take charge of their future and support others along the way.

And that brings me back to CAMFED's approach to systems transformation. We believe that

belonging starts with a community.

Being in a community means having a collective sense of belonging, whether that's through a shared geographic location, or common interests, values, and identity. CAMFED's work, by invitation of Ministries of Education, starts at the community level, where we listen carefully and explore our shared values.



We ask what ambitions families have for their girls, and how we can support those. And we always start from one non-negotiable, shared belief that makes our work possible: that every single child belongs in the classroom and has the right to a quality education.

It's a privilege to hear from parents about their aspirations - and that privilege is built on trust.

I've never met a parent in the rural communities of Africa who doesn't have wild aspirations for their child. How we support those aspirations is key.

Let me take you back to 2009, the year we founded CAMFED Malawi. I led that expansion work, and when I first introduced CAMFED to community members in Machinga in rural Malawi, I was greeted with understandable suspicion - "Who are these people coming in offering us money to send our daughters to school? Is it real? What do they want in return?"

When I explained that I myself had been a rural girl in Zimbabwe, and one of the first supported through school by the organization I now represent, the elders did not believe me. They told me that I did not look or sound like a rural girl. So they challenged me to pound grain. Communal grain pounding is part of daily life, and it's an opportunity for women to socialize and catch up on the local news. They use heavy wooden mortars and long pestles to grind down dried grain into corn flour, which is then used to make a thick porridge, our staple food known as Nsima in Malawi, Nshima in Zambia and Sadza in Zimbabwe.

Well, I was happy to rise to that challenge — pounding grain alone is one thing, doing it in coordination with others is quite another, and when they saw I knew how to handle that, the community quickly appreciated that my background was not so different from theirs. And so our work together began.

I tell this story because trust is everything, and lived experience is invaluable. It brings the empathy we need to look beneath the surface and engage as humans with a shared vision for a better future.

I never tire of hearing parents voice their dreams for their daughters. When I asked the parents in Machinga, "What do you want your children to be?" some of them said doctors, or lawyers, but I'll never forget the mother who said, "I want my daughter to be the Deputy Director for Basic Education in Malawi." - a very specific job title! It turned out that the then-deputy director was a son from that village, and she wanted the same for her daughter.

If we are to achieve our vision of a world in which every child is educated, protected, respected, and valued, and knows that they belong, we need to tackle the many interconnected challenges that deny children that right.

And the way to tackle those challenges is with the communities we serve, because parents know that education is the route out of intergenerational poverty, it's the only way to build a better future. Their commitment and partnership are the backbone of sustainable development. As we say, "Nothing about us, without us."

That commitment is the starting point. How we complement and help its impact grow matters. CAMFED works in places where the challenges of poverty, gender inequality and geography are at their most severe and result in a lack of opportunity for young people.

Unlike the inaccurate narratives that interpret lack of means as lack of ambition, I can only repeat that education is highly prized in Africa. I can name endless examples of rural families giving their all to support their children's education, and that still not being enough, because the odds are stacked against them.

I think of Fadila in Northern Ghana whose father managed to raise just enough money to enroll her in senior high school by selling off the family's essential food crops. Shortly after, he suffered an accident that left him unable to work. Fadila had to work multiple jobs, yet she still couldn't save enough for school-going costs.

Or Alice in Zambia who worked alongside her widowed mother foraging and selling cassava leaves and working as domestic maids to try and raise enough money for school fees and supplies.

There's Stumai in Tanzania, whose mother is a single parent living with a disability. She ended up selling the last piece of sheet metal she owned — and had been saving to build a secure home for her children — because it was the only way to raise enough money to send her daughter to school.

And there's my own story, and that of the women in my family: Education gave me a deep sense of belonging, and I was obsessed with school. I loved learning, and in the classroom, I felt that I mattered. But during my final year at primary school, I realized: this is where it stops for me. In some ways I felt fortunate: My grandmother had left school at a much younger age, and my mother, the most intelligent pupil in her class, was forced to leave before completing primary school.

My parents wanted nothing more than for me to continue my education. They were well

aware of the opportunities secondary education could bring. It can be a ticket out of poverty. But for them, it was just like admiring expensive items in a shop window: far beyond their financial means.

My primary school teacher did everything he could: Every time the inspectors came to collect school fees, he'd encourage me to hide in the toilets, so I wouldn't be sent home — he knew my family couldn't pay. He had taught my mother before me, and wanted to make sure history did not repeat itself.

But my mother saw what was coming, and her despair showed up in the many 'migraines' she dealt with - this is how she explained the eyes sore from the crying she did when she saw how her fate would become my fate, because we did not have the means to afford secondary school.

My entire community showed up to celebrate when, for my final exams at primary school, I received the best grades ever recorded. That same community saw me weep, not from joy but from hopelessness, as good grades did not mean anything when you had no money to buy the uniform, school shoes, menstrual supplies and transportation to go to secondary school.

But then my community showed up for me again when CAMFED first came to my district, by selecting me to receive scholarship support from the organization. I didn't believe them. I thought, "Who would help a poor girl they don't even know?" Even today, girls who receive support from CAMFED respond in the same way: this is too good to be true.



But my mother was so happy. She sold two buckets of maize - food that was supposed to feed my family - to buy me the toothbrush and blanket I needed to board at the school, as it was too far away from home to make the daily journey. And she took me there, because this was her dream, too.

Yet I lived in a state of constant guilt, because I thought about the sacrifices my family had to make to get me there. At school I had enough to eat, but I knew that they were struggling. Imagine carrying survivor's guilt just for being in a classroom.

Whenever I speak about the injustice of being denied an education, I'm reminded of my mother and all the girls in my class who didn't get that chance, whose life is now profoundly different to my own. I know what it means to get an education, and I wish this for everyone.

I was lucky enough to have another dedicated teacher at secondary school - himself from a marginalized background - who helped me persevere during times when I felt I should leave school to support my family.

June is one of the coldest months in Zimbabwe, and it's the hardest month to get through when you feel lonely and homesick. This teacher encouraged me to persist. He said, "I want you to know there are four Junes that will be very cold. You are going to go through four Junes [at school] to make your life better. And then you can go back to your village and transform the lives of your family. You are the person who can rescue them."

Imagine that burden on a single girl's shoulders.

That moment stayed with me, because as my teacher removed my burden of guilt, he also inadvertently replaced it with something equally daunting: the burden of expectation.

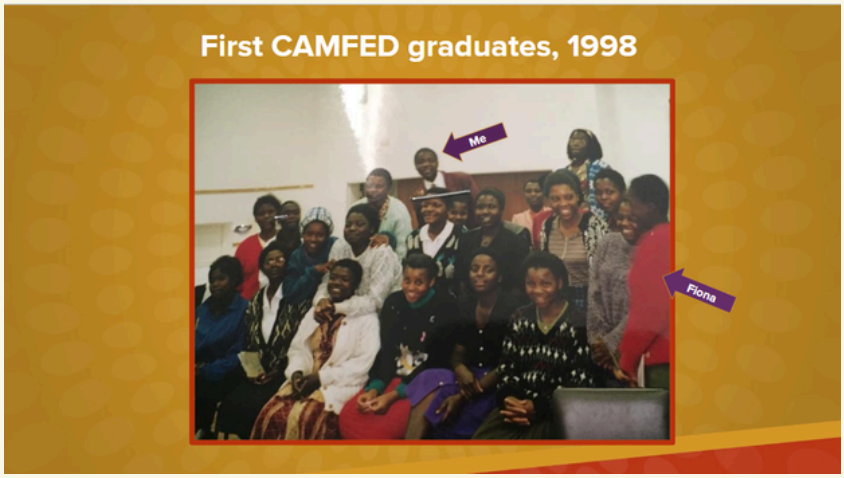
Imagine being a girl barely hanging on to her education, then knowing that your family's fortune depends on you. We hear it all the time: Girls' education is the silver bullet, the solution to poverty, inequality, instability....

But there's a fundamental problem that must be addressed: If you support a girl through school without creating the support systems and opportunities she needs to thrive, you're just putting a certificate in her hand, but slotting her right back into a world where the odds are stacked against her.

Because the truth is: It's extremely hard to be what you cannot see, and as the first CAMFED graduates, we were among the first young women in our communities to get this far.

But now imagine feeling the pressure not just to address your own family's poverty, but to be the solution to the world's problems.

So as the first 400 of us came together, we surveyed what awaited us: we didn't have any mentors or role models who walked this path before us.



We knew English, math and science. We even knew how a 3-pin plug worked, although we had never used one - none of our homes had electricity!

But we didn't know how to write a CV, find a job, apply for work, succeed in an interview, or what steps to take to start our own business. We also didn't have the money for decent clothes or the bus fare to the next town.

Most of us knew about subsistence farming, as we'd helped on our family plots for years. But we didn't know how to obtain land, or a loan, or how to grow crops abundantly in the face of climate crises.

So when we exchanged our stories — and recognized that we were not alone — we decided to set up a sisterhood of educated young women in Africa.

We would be proud of our scars, carry the burden together, and ensure it would be lighter for the next generation.

We'd ensure that vulnerable girls have a sister to lean on - in the classroom and throughout their lives.

We shared our expertise and lived experience by working as part of CAMFED. Together we ensured that what started as the deep commitment by graduates to their communities became a holistic approach that helps girls thrive in school, and equips them with the skills and support networks they need to succeed.

CAMFED provides girls with financial support for all the school necessities - like decent clothes, notebooks, and menstrual products.



And we nurture an ecosystem of social support around girls to make sure they can learn: Community committees look after student safety and wellbeing; parents tend school gardens, cook school meals and build safe toilets; traditional leaders tackle child marriage and invite young women to the decision-making table.

Crucially, graduates who join our sisterhood, the CAMFED Association - like the women you heard from in our video - guide girls on the journey through school and into lives of independence and influence.

For decades, we've refined a model where women once at the margins of society know they belong

and we know how successful it is: Our sisters are leaders who lift each other up, and ensure that no girl has to carry the weight of poverty and expectations on her own.

- When you want to start a business, an experienced sister will mentor you, so you can learn from her mistakes and innovate together.
- When you're looking for a job, a sister will help you to apply, and lend you a dress.
- When you're looking for a university scholarship, a sister will help you tackle the application and show you around when you get there.
- When you're new in a district, a sister will share her network with you.
- When severe weather ruins your crops, a sister will loan you money to start again, and share the climate-smart farming techniques you need to succeed.

Graduating from school is a vital step, but the journey remains challenging for a rural girl. It's the support of women who've succeeded before her, and the community that surrounds her, that show her what's possible, and as more girls graduate, that journey becomes easier.



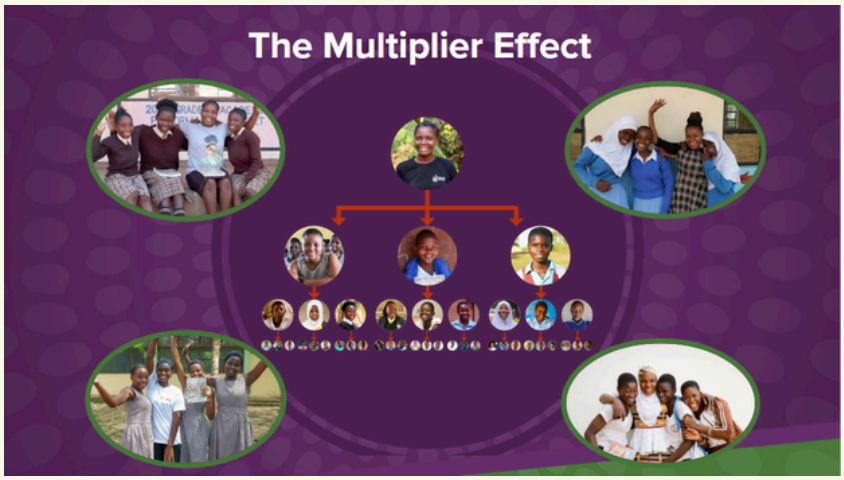
We're showing that our background does not define who we are.

One of my fellow sisters in the CAMFED Association in Zimbabwe, Nancy, recently spoke about the time she was 16 years old and met her mentor, Winnie, who was, like me, among the first girls educated with CAMFED support. She said, *"I was sharing my story with her. I remember we were crying so bad together, but that was the last time I would cry sharing my sharing my story because she shifted my thinking. I started to look at my story not from a point of vulnerability but as a fuel to achieve greatness. And 15 years later, her continued mentorship and guidance have remained a constant pillar. Now I actively support her in the tertiary education projects she leads and we are ensuring that young girls walking the same journey that I have walked begin to transition with purpose and clarity and viewing their scars as crowns and not as points on the road to downfall, but to greatness."*

The change sparked by the first 400 CAMFED graduates and their communities has become a global movement we can all belong to.

Our network of 355,000 young women leaders is organized into accountable committees dedicated to supporting the education of millions more children by mobilizing funds, raising awareness, mentoring and guiding their peers, sharing and creating job opportunities, and bringing their expertise to decision making tables at every level.

Each member of our network financially supports, on average, 3 more girls to go to school. In 2025 alone, CAMFED Association members financially supported 1.3 million young people in education, including more than 890,000 girls in primary and secondary school. And they mentored and passed on their skills to many more, advocated for rights and changed mindsets every single day.



"I believe education is more than just learning – it's the force that breaks barriers, opens doors, and builds futures," Jessica, a secondary student and aspiring chemistry lecturer in Zambia told us earlier this year.

This is what we call the Multiplier Effect – the impact a girl's education has on her own life choices, others' lives, and on the health, wealth and equality of our world.

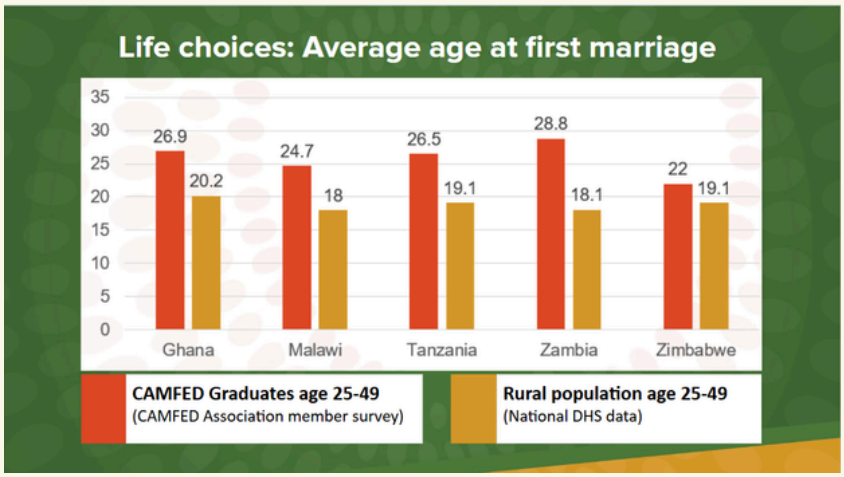
What does this look like in practice? We regularly survey graduates in our network about their choices and activities, and here's just a small sample of our latest data:

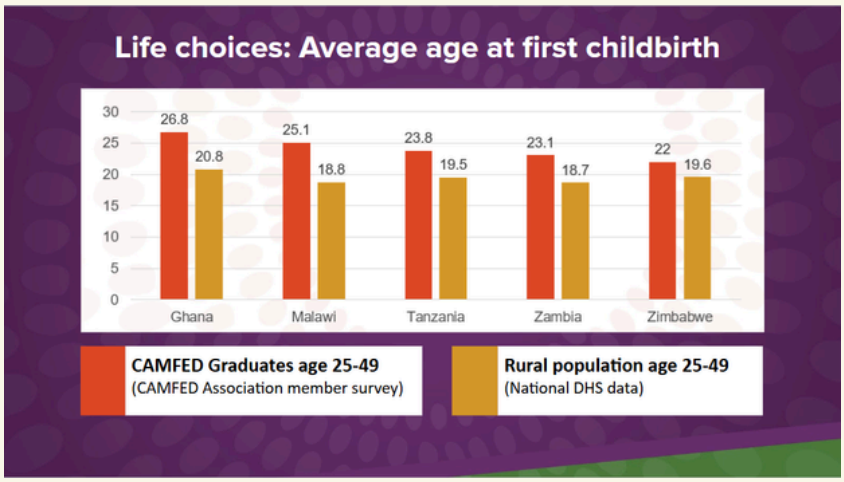


41% of CAMFED Association members are in **leadership roles** in education systems and the wider community.

We've consistently seen our graduates marry later - up to a decade later - than their peers in rural communities. Education is about the ability to have influence over your life, including by deciding if and when to marry.

We also see a difference of up to six and a half years of delayed motherhood for graduates in the CAMFED Association when compared to their rural peers.





The median age at which young women have their first child is also an indicator of the choices they are able to make for themselves and their families.

These life choices become possible when young women have gained the support and knowledge to secure their rights, and the resources and networks to resist any pressure to marry at a young age or enter relationships as a means to greater financial security. That's why supporting young women into secure livelihoods is also safeguarding work.



In 2025 alone, 27,478 young women in our network created employment for themselves by starting businesses. And they created 18,259 jobs for others. More than 80% of CAMFED Association members who were employed or had a business last year considered themselves to be in dignified and fulfilling work.

This is just a snapshot of what is possible when we make sure that girls know they belong in the classroom, they belong in the workforce, and they belong in leadership positions — and when we invest in holistic programs to make sure they get there.

As CAMFED CEO, I'm only too aware that I embody that belonging - and it's my duty to remind you that I am merely a representative of the 355,000 young women leaders across our continent to whom CAMFED is directly accountable.

These are also the sisters that prop me up - the sisters I can lean on during the toughest, most frustrating days. That's when we remind each other why we do what we do: because there can be no peace in our heart, and no peace in the world, when millions are excluded from their right to learn and thrive. Exclusion is where division starts. Peace is about belonging.

Ours is not an exclusive club - it's a movement in service to our communities, and a blueprint for a more equitable world, where we are all accountable to the most marginalized in society, and we take our lead from them.

As my sister Leah Jamilton, Chapter Chair of the CAMFED Association in Kenya, said

"The true power of girls' education lies not just in individual success, but in a transformative effect that uplifts families, propels nations towards positive change and helps communities to flourish. Through the CAMFED Association, we have turned solidarity into a force that uplifts millions. When women lead together, we don't just change the story—we become the authors of the story."

And to all you storytellers out there, let me leave you with the words of Annie Mpango, a relatively new CAMFED Association member in our newest country of operation, Kenya. Her poem speaks to the transformation that happens when you find your place of belonging:

[Watch Annie's poem here: https://www.youtube.com/shorts/-uVnTYbleng]



The 2026 Seoul Peace Prize belongs to my sisters across the African continent, from whom peace and kindness emanates outward. It belongs to our school communities for their steadfast commitment to education, and to everyone joining and fueling this movement to build a better world. I hope all of you, too, will become “part of the noise, the good kind… the kind that builds.”

