



## **Ann Cotton – 2014 WISE Prize for Education Laureate**

**Special Address at the World Innovation Summit for Education in Doha on 6 November 2014**

Your Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, Chairperson of the Qatar Foundation; Your Excellency Dr Abdulla bin Ali Al-Thani, Chair of Wise; Fellow Delegates:

*'In the little world in which children have their existence, whosoever brings them up, there is nothing so finely perceived, and so finely felt as injustice'.*

These are the words of Charles Dickens - writing *Great Expectations* 150 years ago. His finely attuned sense of injustice infuses all his novels and especially the circumstances of the childhood characters, who have withstood the crossing of time and seas to enlarge human imagination and compassion.

In his afternoon walks around London, Dickens met children who were experiencing a force of neglect and punishment that they were powerless to change. And in our own twenty-first century, millions of children still endure childhoods without the resources and opportunities that are the foundations for a secure and happy life.

Education is the right of every child. It is fundamental to their development and to their welfare. We are gathered at the WISE Summit because every one of us knows and believes this.

We are here to learn and to imagine what is possible, and to unite to create a world that gives every child an extended, quality education.

My professional experience is in rural Africa.

Imagine life through the eyes of a poor girl. Every morning you get up in the dark to haul water home. You help your mother fan the embers of yesterday's fire to cook breakfast. As daylight grows, you watch as friends from less impoverished homes make their way to school, and you wonder: What would it be like to be one of them? But then you think this will never happen, and that your only future is early marriage, early childbirth and a life of endless days with a heavy round of domestic and agricultural chores.

Who might this girl have become?

Multiply her loss of education by the loss to tens of millions of girls out of school, and the impact in human misery is incalculable. It is a global catastrophe that we can see in child mortality, maternal mortality, food insecurity and fragile economies. Girls' educational exclusion is neither neutral nor passive in its impact. And it is manifestly unjust.

How then do we restore justice? How do we catalyse education for girls? How do we unlock the transformative power of girls' education whose benefits hold a positive multiplier like no other?

Let me share some of what we have learnt. Come back with me to 1991 when girls' exclusion from education was seen in international development circles as an intractable problem and one in which cultural resistance by poor parents to the education of their daughters was perceived as being at the root.

I went to the village of Mola in Zimbabwe to study the problem, to a community where there were seven boys for every girl at secondary school. And the community - the parents, the teachers, the Chief - with one voice gave me their answer: Poverty. Their decisions did not spring from any traditional culture but from the depth of poverty, in which choice is an illusion, and where every spending decision has a bearing on survival itself. Boys' education was favoured over girls because they had the best chance of future paid work. They could travel to commercial farms and fisheries and bring money back to their families.

Those families' decisions made sense. But they were misunderstood by many of the experts in the field. And this misunderstanding became the accepted knowledge upon which education initiatives for girls were planned. A heavy investment was made in persuading poor families to act in a way that was, quite simply, not possible.

We must reject the unspoken premise that the poor are somehow different, an amorphous mass that makes incomprehensible decisions, that irritate those who think they know. "Why can't the poor make responsible decisions?" some experts ask.

Poor parents share the universal desire for education for their children. No family in our experience has ever turned down educational support for their daughter. Not one. And because this is so, Camfed has worked for more than two decades in partnership with poor families, transforming this desire for girls' education into reality.

The community of Mola also taught me about the different dimensions of poverty. The material marks were all too apparent in the patched huts, the swollen stomachs of children, and the thin frames of adults. Yet what of the invisible psychological marks?

To be poor is to live in a constant state of anxiety. Nothing is secure. Nothing is assured. The human imagination is reduced to an obsession with money and how to get small, very small amounts that can halt a family's fall into complete destitution.

Imagine the psychological impact on a mother as she watches her child cry for the want of food.

Imagine the fear of mothers and fathers as they watch the skies for the start of late rains that will bring the next harvest.

Imagine a family that takes their sick son to their rural clinic in a wheelbarrow but refuses to allow him to go to hospital in the city because, if he were to die, there they could not afford to bring his body home. I met this family in Mola after their eight year old son had died...

These lessons about the dehumanising burden of poverty formed the foundation of Camfed's Model for Girl's Educational Inclusion. 'Inclusion' is one key to our programme's success.

We invite poor communities to be our partners and we build those partnerships around the girl.

And in recognising the psychological impact of poverty, we build programmes that reflect back to each girl her intrinsic importance.

We measure her carefully for uniforms that fit.

We give her sturdy shoes.

We follow her academic progress.

We don't exclude her for poor performance.

We act swiftly to support her if she is ill.

And in this behaviour, we publicly affirm that each girl is entitled to our respect and service. This commitment raises a girl's status in her own eyes - a fundamental step in her path out of poverty.

Does this sound idealistic to you?

Some years ago, when I explained our model to an audience, someone made the statement,

"It sounds wonderful, but this high touch approach can't be scaled." Not so. Since 1993, more than 3,000,000 children and young people have benefitted from Camfed programmes at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, across Ghana, Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

And in October this year, Camfed was officially recognised by the OECD as a model of best practice in taking education innovation to scale.

The world has proved enough times that it can scale cruelty and violence. Compassion and kindness can and must be scaled to create a world of justice for children.

Let me describe how.

Camfed's reach extends far beyond financing girls' education; we help communities develop the thing they need most - rich new sources of capital.

**Knowledge capital** that is critical for programmes to work pre-existed Camfed's work in the community. Grandmothers, who are often illiterate and heading households, hold vital knowledge about the psychological effects of the death of someone close - on themselves and on the children they care for.

Camfed's task is to create the opportunities that will enable them to share their knowledge, including having the confidence that they will be respected and listened to carefully.

Two weeks ago I was in Malawi and visited one of the 176 pre-schools we support. In the early morning, ten local mothers were preparing and serving nutritious porridge to 70 three to five year olds, something they do every day from Monday to Friday. I asked the mothers if they thought some of the children were more vulnerable than others.

"Yes," one replied. "We can see those who are most hungry by the way they eat. We give them extra."

Only the mothers in this community would have the knowledge to detect in little children's behaviour these signs of deprivation, and act immediately.

**Institutional capital** is also fully recognised by Camfed, and we work with existing structures, such as government schools and clinics, chieftaincies and their courts, and faith-based leaders and their mosques and churches.

Camfed also catalyses the emergence of new institutions: Community Development Committees, for example, were conceived as a joined-up system for local government officers and community activists, ensuring that the knowledge and power of all constituencies is brought to the table to advance girls' education. They contribute as volunteers.

And perhaps the greatest evidence of the impact of our work is CAMA, the alumnae network of secondary school graduates of Camfed's programme. It provides a forum in which young women can grow their decision-making and leadership capabilities.

How do elites consolidate their power? Through their alumni. This is what we have created for one of the most disadvantaged social groups in the world today – girls in rural Africa.

Let me share CAMA's genesis. When in 1998 Lucy Lake, my colleague of twenty years and now Camfed's Chief Executive Officer, and I realised that the first group of girls graduating from secondary education faced a dangerous transition into young adulthood, we examined the problem with the girls themselves. CAMA was created by the first 400 girls to complete secondary school education in our programme.

Today, CAMA has 24,436 members across Ghana, Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. They are Muslims and Christians, they speak around thirty different languages, and from this broad background they share a broad vision. They are 'united by a background of rural poverty and the determination to transform their communities'. They have delayed marriage and motherhood.

Their example as role models is having a powerful impact. In Malawi, 5 per cent of young women who received Camfed bursaries have become mothers, compared to 27 per cent nationally in the same age group.

Each CAMA member was once a barefoot child unable to say her name with confidence. Angeline Murimirwa was top in her district's primary school exams. But her parents could not afford to send her to secondary school. Neighbours sympathised with the parents' disappointment.

"It's a shame. Those with too many pumpkins don't have the pots to cook them."

She was supported by Camfed throughout her adolescence and young adulthood. She is now Camfed's Regional Executive Director in Africa, leading the delivery of the UK government's investment to support 139,000 girls in secondary education in Zimbabwe, Malawi and Tanzania.

Runyararo Mashingaidze wrote to me of her longing for secondary education in 1993,

"If only I get the chance, I will do something great."

Today she is Doctor Mashingaidze, a hospital doctor in Namibia.

Patricia Mangoma set up a small rural business with a grant from Camfed. Its early profits supported her brothers and sisters to go to school. She employed young people in her community and trained them to establish their own businesses. Patricia supported the creation of the Seed Money Programme that is now in place across five countries, and has so far led to the establishment of 9,702 businesses. Patricia is with us here today.

These are three of 24,436 CAMA members. Others are winning awards and accolades. Ruka Yaro De-Liman, a leading CAMA member in Ghana, was honoured with a Mandela Washington fellowship at President Obama's Young African Leaders Summit three months ago. Abigail Kaindu sits on the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's Youth Advisory Group for Education.

CAMA's collective power grows exponentially. Members are supporting at least two or three children beyond their extended family. And 2033 are Learner Guides, improving the quality and relevance of education in rural schools - powerful role models for the next generation. A further 154,618 people have been trained by CAMA in financial literacy.

Which leads me to **financial capital**. This requires training in financial management, critical to the eradication of poverty. How can communities grow their decision-making around financial resources if they are not allowed to handle them? This risk-averse practice infantilises poor people and undermines confidence and trust.

In our programme, everyone in the community knows how much, and when, money will arrive. Everyone is accountable to the child. The financial resources are dedicated to them, and protected for them. Our financial systems are extremely tight, designed by Luxon Shumba, our Finance Director, and linked to our data monitoring system, so that we can track investments, as well as school enrolment and retention.

Let's return to Charles Dickens. He never got over his shame at the fact that when his father went to prison for being unable to pay his debts, he became a child labourer in a factory blacking fire grates. His biographer only revealed these details two years after his death. Dickens understood poverty because he had lived it.

Poverty creates embarrassment and shame. CAMA members understand this. But they have transformed these marks of poverty into pride and empathy. Pride in their own and their families' struggles, and empathy for those who are like they once were. They are moving into health and education institutions and transforming them from within.

Dr. Runyararo Mashingaidze said to me, "When I am at the hospital and I see a nurse being unkind to a rural woman I say, "Respect her, she could be my mother." And they are shocked because they do not think a woman in a white coat comes from such a background."

Remember the little girl we imagined as I began? As we gather here, she does not know that the WISE Prize that I am honoured to receive will transform her future in a way she cannot begin to imagine. She does not know that her step across the threshold of a classroom will be a step for justice.

We are committing to support 1,000,000 more girls through secondary education over the next five years. Their latent transformative power will become real. They will transform the lives of generations to come.

Your Highness, Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen: Join them. There is no time to lose.