

Camfed International management response to the final evaluation of the project *Supporting Young Women to Lead Change in Rural Malawi*

With support from the Human Dignity Foundation, this project launched the Camfed Association (CAMA) network in Malawi in 2013 to help meet some of the challenges that young women face, developing their confidence and agency and empowering them with the resources and infrastructure they need to lead transformative, sustainable change in their communities. This significant network of educated young women is ideally placed to advocate for the rights of children's education and protection, young women who have themselves grown up in poverty and who are now reaping the benefits of their own education and empowerment.

The project aimed to do the following: establish a vibrant network for young women in rural areas to offer peer support and infrastructure for activism; provide opportunities for increased or more secure incomes for young women, through business development and tertiary education, to enable them to support themselves and their families and provide professional role models for younger girls; and engage young women in increased levels of philanthropy, activism and civic engagement, with the CAMA network as a key supporting structure in systematising young women's give-back.

At the completion of the project in 2016, a final evaluation was conducted by the Centre for International Development and Training (CIDT) at the University of Wolverhampton. This document provides Camfed's management response to the evaluation report produced and seeks to lay out our thoughts on both the process of the evaluation itself and the findings described in the report.

From Camfed's perspective, the evaluation process was managed professionally and smoothly. We found communication with CIDT to be very easy and we were pleased with the respectful way in which all members of the fieldwork team conducted interviews with CAMA members and Camfed staff, as well as local stakeholders. We also found engaging in the evaluation findings very valuable. These confirmed the strength and achievements of the CAMA network, validating the work done under our collaboration with the Human Dignity Foundation to empower young women to drive change in their communities. It was particularly positive to recognise that all targets were either achieved or exceeded, with the report noting that the project surpassed expectations through the significant positive effect it had on the young women involved, their families and their communities. The fact that the project is beginning to make a real difference to gender equality in rural communities is an extremely positive finding, affirming as it does our central belief that young women are the key to leading this change. The report also provides useful insights and constructive suggestions for us to reflect on within our partnership with the Human Dignity Foundation, as well as in discussing the future of the CAMA network with CAMA leaders in all our partner countries.

A key theme emerging from the report was sustainability. Camfed views sustainability on a number of levels. At the most profound level, we believe that transformative change – and therefore sustainability – is realised when the most disadvantaged, such as young, rural, Malawian women, are supported to change the context in which they live and operate, fulfilling their potential and taking up positions of leadership. In these leadership roles, women can ensure the causes of poverty and issues such as early marriage are tackled at scale and that the interests of poor, rural communities are both represented and protected. Our support for young women's income generation and tertiary education helps build this long term sustainability by empowering women to take up leadership roles and, as a result, by helping to change embedded attitudes to gender roles and norms. This promotes change within whole communities that has a lasting effect beyond the generation of young women initially supported, and as they continue to support other vulnerable children the sustainability of the programme is evident.

The income generating activities of the young women we support are also increasingly sustainable in a number of ways. When CAMA members are supported with seed grants and loans to start businesses or pursue further education and training, this not only improves their own position, but the position of their families and others they can support either directly or through the employment opportunities they create. The philanthropic values espoused by the CAMA network are at the heart of young women's drive to plough back proportions of their profits into their wider communities and to support each other financially as far as possible. These two approaches combine to build a foundation for sustainable financing of CAMA members' business ventures, in order to make scarce resources go further. Already, CAMA members in three districts in Malawi have supported an additional 189 young women with business grants and there is significant potential for this to scale as the first group of CAMA entrepreneurs grow their businesses and as the CAMA network matures. This is where we see the truly sustainable nature of the programme.

We note the recommendations made by the evaluators, which highlight some of the critical issues facing the young women and communities we work with in Malawi, as well as some key challenges in the development of the programme going forward. Camfed will work with our stakeholders on an ongoing basis to discuss these and develop programmes and community-led initiatives that best address these issues in the rural context. The intelligent learning the report offers will help inform not only our work with the Human Dignity Foundation but also the wider programme goals and outcomes for CAMA and Camfed Malawi, as well as the rest of Camfed's consortium more widely. This is particularly valuable at this point in time, during a period of review of CAMA across all of Camfed's countries of operation, when CAMA leaders as well as Camfed's executive team are examining many aspects of CAMA and its related programmes to ensure the network remains dynamic, relevant and accessible.