

APN YOUNG AFRICAN LEADERS CONVERSATION WITH THEMBEKILE MASEKO



In this interview with Thembekile Maseko, the African Youth Philanthropy Network (AYPN) Leader, we discuss the importance of collaboration and solidarity in driving change through youth philanthropy. Thembekile highlights the work of Lonwabo Lwesizwe, a youth-led organization in South Africa, and their initiatives to create safe spaces for young women and children. She also highlights the need for a centralized platform to document and connect youth-led organizations, as well as the value of mentorship. The interview concludes with an inspiring quote by Mahatma Gandhi about the power of serving others.

May you briefly tell us about yourself and the work that you do?

I am a development and communications professional with expertise in non-profit development, specializing in impact-centered youth development, ecosystem building, and social entrepreneurship. My work is dedicated to empowering civil society organizations and giving them a voice. Additionally, I lead the African Youth Philanthropy Network (AYPN), collaborating with philanthropists and youth-led organizations across the continent to drive inclusive and innovative development.

What does African philanthropy mean to you, and what does philanthropy look like in your context?

African philanthropy embodies a longstanding tradition of communal support and identity, reflecting the spirit of Ubuntu, Ujamaa, and Waqf that are at the heart of African community living. It goes beyond financial contributions to improve the overall quality of life. It is an "alternative" practice often overlooked in mainstream development, providing a solution to aid in Africa.

To me, African philanthropy looks like households contributing a portion of their income to create communal gardens that provide sustenance and profit. It also looks like community members living in the diaspora going beyond providing for their immediate families and sponsoring the education of less privileged children. African philanthropy, in essence, is a sustainable, people-driven development system that is not solely reliant on international donors.

Could you please share a story that highlights how Youth Philanthropy is driving change in your community?

In the low-income township of Freedom Park in Johannesburg, South Africa, a youth-led organization known as Lonwabo Lwesizwe is making a significant impact. Founded by Paris Makaringe and fellow young residents, this organization emerged in response to the challenges facing their community. Lonwabo Lwesizwe has initiated programs like 'I am a Woman' and '1000 Kids 1000 Smiles,' both dedicated to creating safe spaces for young women and children. These initiatives provide essential support, including food packs, school shoes, free haircuts, and winter drives, benefiting disadvantaged families.

What sets their work apart is their ability to accomplish these goals without relying on traditional donors. Instead, they rely on contributions from more privileged community members, support from local churches, and goodwill donations from businesses, including local barbershops. Lonwabo Lwesizwe is just one example of the many inspiring stories within the AYPN ecosystem that deserve recognition.

In your opinion, how can young people drive change or youth philanthropy in Africa?

We cannot afford to continue working in silos, as our efforts have thus far been too fragmented. However, we have the potential for a much greater and transformative impact if we unite and collaborate. Solidarity is essential for driving change across the continent. Additionally, it is our responsibility as leaders of today to create innovative systems and platforms that redefine development and philanthropy, making them more efficient in our current global context. We must take the initiative, learn, and enhance existing systems for the better.

What factors do you believe should be considered to grow Youth Philanthropy on the continent?

Many young individuals and youth-led organizations are already engaged in philanthropic efforts across the continent. However, there is a pressing need for a centralized platform or database to document their work and facilitate connections among like-minded youth across Africa. Additionally, while project funding remains a challenge, I firmly believe that mentorship from experienced industry professionals is equally valuable. Such mentorship can help young leaders in the sector make fewer mistakes, enhance their resource mobilization skills, network, and build their individual capacities. These two components are vital for the advancement of African Youth Philanthropy.

Finally, could you share an inspiring quote about giving that resonates with you?

"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." - Mahatma Gandhi

This quote has been a driving force behind all the work I do, serving as a constant reminder that it's not always about profit or status, but about serving others.