

## **YOUNG AFRICAN LEADERS CONVERSATION WITH VANESSA CHRISTELLE DONKENG**

In this interview, we speak with Vanessa Donkeng, a Cameroonian with a passion for creating positive change. Vanessa intends to contribute to a more inclusive and just society by utilizing her communications and translation skills to transcend linguistic borders.

***Could you please briefly tell us about yourself and the work that you do?***

Certainly! My name is Vanessa Christelle DONKENG. I am a young female Cameroonian. I work as a Translator/Interpreter at the Court of Appeal in the Far North Region of Cameroon. Currently, I am also working in the field of philanthropy as the Translations and Communications Officer for APN. In this role, I have the privilege of utilizing my language and communication skills to transcend linguistic borders and spread meaningful messages, as well as creating impactful content. Throughout my years of volunteering experience, I have dedicated my time to various critical areas such as Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), Infant and Maternal Mortality, People Living with Disabilities, and peace processes programs. Through my volunteering work, I have gained profound insights into pressing issues in society and honed my abilities to advocate for positive change. I strongly believe in the transformative power of effective communication and strive to contribute to creating a more inclusive and just society through my humble efforts.

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

African philanthropy is of significant importance to me. It starts at home, as they say, "charity begins at home." It involves helping your brothers with their homework, assisting in paying their school fees, taking care of orphans, etc. Living in Cameroon, a country where the ongoing Anglophone crisis has lasted for about 8 years, and particularly living in a region where several attacks from Boko Haram have rendered most of the population homeless and bereaved, I believe African philanthropy in Cameroon reflects the deep sense of community and compassion that Cameroonians have, as well as our desire to create positive change around us. It goes beyond financial giving. When the Anglophone crisis was at its peak, with houses, schools, and hospitals being burnt, all the people from the crisis-affected regions who fled to bordering towns and villages were welcomed as family by the people they met. They were admitted to schools and hospitals free of charge, to name just a few examples. Globally, African philanthropy encompasses a holistic approach that includes time, resources, skills, and knowledge, all aimed at uplifting and empowering communities and individuals. It is about supporting sustainable development, addressing systemic changes, and promoting social justice. African philanthropy takes shape through initiatives and organizations, as well as individuals who work relentlessly to improve the lives of vulnerable populations. They make significant efforts to combat poverty, promote education and healthcare, empower women and youth, protect the environment, and foster inclusive development. In summary, African philanthropy, from my perspective, is a powerful force that drives positive change and promotes social justice. It harnesses both financial and non-financial resources to uplift communities and create lasting impact.

***Could you please share a story of how youth philanthropy is driving change in your community?***

The youth of Cameroon are very vibrant and innovative, dedicated to making a positive impact. I think two instances have struck me the most when it comes to youth philanthropy driving change in Cameroon. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted many youth-led initiatives in Cameroon. Due to lockdown and little or no access to foodstuff, as well as face masks and hand sanitizers, many youth groups took it upon themselves to go door-to-door in communities where there was little or no information about COVID-19.

They raised awareness, explained how to prevent the virus, and educated people about the different signs, symptoms, and what to do if one notices the symptoms. Others who had more resources went into local manufacturing of facemasks, hand gels, soap, and buckets, which were distributed to families, schools, and orphanages. The other instance that impressed me was when Boko Haram attacked towns and villages in the Far North Region of Cameroon. A Facebook group was created for this purpose, where people contributed blankets, buckets, beds, foodstuffs, clothes, and water to assist the affected populations. In less than a week, we were overwhelmed with gifts. The greatest contributions came from the diaspora, who ensured that no one was left behind. This was one of the greatest showcases of the incredible power of youth philanthropy and the ripple effect of the dedication, creativity, passion, and compassion of youth on a community.

### ***How can young people drive youth philanthropy in Africa?***

Young people have the incredible potential to drive change through youth philanthropy in Africa. They can seize opportunities to make their voices heard by engaging in advocacy efforts, participating in decision-making, and collaborating with local organizations to ensure their perspectives are considered. It is equally important to form alliances with like-minded individuals and institutions to pool resources, knowledge, and skills to tackle complex challenges. Harnessing the power of technology and social media is crucial, as today's digital age allows us to raise awareness, mobilize support, and find opportunities. Young people should also promote innovative approaches, as they often bring fresh perspectives and ideas to the table. We need to use our creativity and critical thinking skills to develop approaches and solutions that address social, economic, and environmental challenges in Africa. Advocating for quality education and relevant skills development initiatives is essential. Active participation in community service and volunteering initiatives that align with our passion and interests can directly contribute to uplifting communities. Finally, investing in intergenerational dialogue and seeking mentorship is valuable. While we are creative and innovative, we also need the guidance of experienced philanthropists, mentors, and professionals to learn from their extensive experiences in philanthropic work. Building networks and platforms that bring together youth philanthropists from across Africa to collaborate, share knowledge, and support each other's initiatives is equally important. By embracing these approaches, young people can create lasting impact through youth philanthropy in Africa and contribute to the well-being of themselves and their communities.

### ***What factors can be considered to grow youth philanthropy on the continent?***

Some factors to consider to grow youth philanthropy on the continent are:

- Promoting education and awareness about the concept and benefits of philanthropy among young people. This can be done by incorporating philanthropy education into school curricula and organizing outreach programs to foster a philanthropic mindset.
- Young people need resources, and currently, access to resources is a significant challenge. They need funding, mentorship, and networks that can empower them to initiate and sustain philanthropic endeavors.
- Narratives play a crucial role in the growth of youth philanthropy in Africa. We need narratives that celebrate and recognize the achievements of young philanthropists to inspire others to get involved.
- Cultural sensitivity and local context should be taken into consideration. Recognizing and respecting the cultural diversity and context of different African regions is important. Tailoring youth philanthropic

efforts to align with the needs, values, and traditions of local communities enhances the relevance and effectiveness of youth philanthropy in Africa.

By considering these factors, we can create an enabling environment that nurtures and grows youth philanthropy on the continent, empowering young individuals to become active agents of positive change in their communities.

***Can you share an inspiring quote about giving?***

Well, I did not want to use a borrowed quote but the short one I love is ***“let us be each other’s keeper”*** by this I mean let’s reflect in the spirit of Ubuntu in all our daily actions, right from our thoughts to the materialization of our thoughts. We need to be responsible for the welfare of our brothers, sisters, friends, colleagues, our communities as a whole.