

# Experiences in Philanthropy in Kenya

BUILDING ON RELIGION

## The Case of Malindi

By Dorothy Kweyu

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**Kenya Community Development Foundation (KCDF)**  
PO Box 10501, 00100 Nairobi, Kenya  
Tel: (254-020) 762538/351106 (254-722) 512701  
Fax: (254-020) 762538  
Email: info@ kcdfound.org  
Website: www.kcdfound.org

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This case study is based on research carried out by  
**Mary Nyikuri, Kimuma Kosida and Gregory Naulikha** as program officer.

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Any errors of omission and commission are entirely the writer's. Hopefully, the studies will serve the intended purpose of contributing to learning on local philanthropy in Kenya by virtue of their groundbreaking nature and to serve to convince Kenyans to contribute towards worthy causes.

*—Dorothy Kweyu  
Nairobi, June 2003*

# Background

**B***uilding on Religion: The Case of Malindi*, is one of four case studies on experiences in local philanthropy in Kenya. A project of Kenya Community Development Foundation (KCDF), the study documents the philanthropy of the people of Malindi in Kenya's Coast Province. Specifically, it focuses on charitable practises of the umbrella organisation Star of Hope in Malindi Town and of its affiliated members. Similar studies were done in Kakamega, Siaya and Meru districts. The overall study involved a preliminary survey between November 2001 and April 2003, the experience-sharing workshop in Nairobi from November 25 to 29, 2002 and familiarisation visits to study sites by the writer/editor in December 2002. The aim of the case studies is to inform Kenyans of ongoing charitable activities in Kenya with a view to getting them involved. The idea is to acquaint them with what

is happening in their areas and how they can link up with and support such initiatives. Hopefully, the case studies will convince Kenyans to support worthy causes.

*Star of Hope*, is an account of the philanthropy of Malindi town in Malindi, a new district that was carved from Kilifi district in 1996. The district is one of seven that make up Coast Province. Measuring 7,605 square kilometres, Malindi lies North of Kilifi district and is bordered by Tana River district to the north and north-west and the Indian Ocean to the East.<sup>1</sup>

*Malindi District Development Plan 2002-2008* is the first one that specifically addresses the district's development agenda. Although the parent district, Kilifi existed at the time of the split, it did not address Malindi's priorities. The District Development Committee (DDC)



therefore resolved to develop a five-year development plan to address the needs of Malindi, whose actual implementation was three years—1998/2001. Out of the proposed 101 projects, only 36 projects, plus another 14 projects that were not in the plan were completed. The development plan blames inadequate funding for the poor implementation record. Insufficient funding was due to over-reliance on government funding. The district has very few non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and bilateral organisations.

High poverty levels affect projects, especially those that need community contribution before donor funds are released. This tends to slow down programme implementation.

Almost 66 percent of the Malindi population lives in absolute poverty due to factors such as a decline in tourism, landlessness and high population growth. Malindi also has a high incidence of HIV/Aids—between 15 and 17 percent. This is blamed on promiscuity, prostitution, drug addiction and alcoholism, traditional practices like wife inheritance, polygamy and belief in witchcraft. Due to HIV/Aids, many children need special protection. HIV/Aids has affected social service delivery with Aids patients occupying about 30 percent of hospital beds.

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<sup>1</sup> Information in this background is based on the *Malindi District Development Plan 2002-2008*

## What is Star of Hope?

It is against the above background that Star of Hope, a registered umbrella organisation based in Malindi town, exists. It was formed to provide a forum for linking community resources for better co-ordination of activities, sharing information and experiences, and exchanging ideas and joint development strategies in problem solving among others. An executive board composed of two representatives from each member organisation governs Star of Hope. As a committee, they elect office bearers—the chairman, secretary, treasurer, assistants and an organising secretary—from among themselves.



## Projects and Activities

Star of Hope's projects and activities are in two categories: those that it carries out within its mandate as an umbrella organisation and those that its member organisations implement. Star of Hope provides linkages to mobilise community resources, co-ordinate members' activities and facilitate information and experience sharing. It initiates joint development strategies for solving the problems of the people of Malindi.

## Areas of Operation

Star of Hope is based in and operates from Malindi town.



Capacity building of its members is part of its mandate.

Activities that Star of Hope co-ordinates are projects of member organisations, namely Tawfiq Muslim Youth, Tawheed Muslim Association, Al-Islam Society, Malindi Education and Development Association, Malindi Islamic Centre for Orphans and Malindi Council of Imams.

### **Tawfiq Muslim Youth**

The main project of this group is a hospital. The group is also involved in education and other social services.

### **Tawheed Muslim Association**

The group runs a dispensary and a maternity unit. Its patron has built an amenity ward at the Malindi District Hospital for which the group is responsible.

### **Al-Islam Society**

The 33-member, 37-year-old society is responsible for Madrassa Tahdhib, the first madrassa in Malindi town. The society has 11 madrassa under its umbrella. These are committed to imparting Islamic education. Since 1987, it has introduced an integrated education programme, whose main project is Tahdhib primary school. The society has rental property that earns Ksh 45,000 per month to run its activities.

### **Malindi Education and Development Association**

Formed in 1995, MEDA is a community-based membership organisation of youths, educationists and other cadre in Malindi. Its activities include promoting academic excellence, career guidance, and providing access to information and library services. It is involved in training and job placements and



also creates awareness on drug abuse and HIV/ Aids. MEDA runs a bursary and scholarship programme for needy pupils and students. It is involved in guiding Schools on how to integrate religious and secular education.

### Malindi Islamic Centre for Orphans (MICO)

The centre's priority is meeting the education needs of orphans. Its mission is to provide an enabling environment for orphans to grow as normal children. It has a training programme



to empower widows and orphans in income generation and runs an interest-free lending facility for widows, orphans and their guardians.

### Malindi Council of Imams

The council preaches against evils such as drug abuse and prostitution. It has been instrumental in the closure of brothels and arresting drug peddlers. The council mobilises resources in Mosques to help and care for the needy such as orphans and other disadvantaged groups.

## The Need for Star of Hope

Star of Hope exists to co-ordinate the activities of its members, who are directly involved in addressing the development challenges of Malindi community.

# Star of Hope's Philanthropy

The origins of Star of Hope are deeply rooted in Islamic philanthropy, which states, "Watu bora ni wale wanaowanufaisha wengine" (Kiswahili for, "the best people are those who benefit others"). Solidarity is upheld by sayings such as "Upweke ni uvundo kuondokewa si kwema" meaning, isolation (or loneliness) stinks;



it is not good to be deserted. The saying reaffirms the strength that lies in unity and the extent to which isolation should be shunned. Equally important is, "Haba na haba hujaza kibaba", meaning, little by little fills the measure. The saying stresses the value of even the least contribution. " Heri mkono wa juu kuliko wa chini," means, "Blessed is the hand that gives than the one that takes." The saying that stresses the value of giving is attributed to the Prophet Muhammad.

The philanthropy of the predominantly Islamic Malindi community is key to the realisation of the mission of Star of Hope and its membership. While deeply rooted in religion, the focus of local philanthropy is community development. Beneficiaries of Star of Hope are mainly organisations that target children, youth, women and old people.

# Form and Focus: Who Gives How Much?

## Fundraising Dinners

MEDA has used this method since 1997. Tawfiq Muslim Youth also hosts dinners to mobilise donors from Malindi, Mombasa and Nairobi. Such dinners helped raise 60 percent of resources used to build and start its hospital's operations.

## Donating Skills and Services

Doctors from in and out of Malindi donate their professional skills to all Tawfiq Muslim Youth medical camps. The youth group itself offers free general medical camps, regular free eye and surgical camps in the entire North Coast region particularly during the week of mercy, that is the last week of July every year.

## Service Donations

Most members of the management committee of Tawfiq Muslim Youth run their own

businesses but still find time to volunteer services to free medical clinics every year.

## Appeals

These are popular with most members of Star of Hope. A typical letter of appeal seeks support for pressing needs. MEDA, for instance, seeks help for its bursary fund, paying college loans and financing its operations. It also seeks free office space, library books, textbooks, computers, video cameras, public address systems and projectors for seminars. Sponsorships are sought for education awareness seminars and symposia for parents, teachers, students and the wider community. They have appealed for help to buy a three-acre plot on which to build a permanent centre within Malindi town and for professional advice on how to attain their goals and objectives.

## Donations

Local and international Muslim organisations have supported all the free medical activities of Tawfiq Muslim Youth. They include Muslim Aid of London and World Assembly of Muslim Youth of Saudi Arabia and similar organisations in Pakistan and Abu Dhabi. Their support helped build the maternity wing, equip the laboratory and buy medicines.

Locally, the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims, the Islamic Foundation and Young Muslims Association are among the organisations that have supported Tawfiq Muslim Youth.

## Open Days

Al-Islam Society used one open day to raise one million Kenya shillings impromptu. A visitor from Saudi Arabia representing an Islamic NGO doubled the amount.

## Medical Fund

The medical fund brings together representatives from Tawfiq Muslim Youth, MEDA and Malindi Islamic Centre for Orphans. The fund provides access to specialised treatment overseas.

## Annual Fundraising

Local Zakat fund activities are held in 17 mosques in Malindi town. It is the main source of funding for the orphans' centre. Collections start in mosques from the first day of Ramadhan and climax with the prize giving-cum-fundraising session on the eve of Idd-ul-Fitr. From a mere Ksh 140, 000 in 1994, the fund has steadily risen over the years to raise Ksh. 1.5 million in 1997.

The collection goes towards paying for schools and madrassa fees, buying textbooks, school uniforms and other educational support for orphans. It also goes towards providing food and medical services.

## Incentives and Disincentives to Giving

According to the Council of Imams, poverty is eroding the Muslim spirit of volunteerism or philanthropy. People want to engage only in activities with immediate monetary gain.

While Tawheed Muslim Association classifies Tawheed Girls Academy as a community sponsored project, it is registered as a private school. This creates the wrong view that it is a private profit-making venture. Thus, the school does not receive government support such as qualified teachers, despite having adequate staff houses.

Probably the greatest incentive to giving is the promise of eternity. As the saying goes, "Ukitoa kile ambacho kitawanufaisha wengi faida yake ni ya milele." This means, if you give, your reward is forever. Said a local philanthropist: "Giving is like foreign currency invested with God."

He adds: "When we go to meet our creator, it is these deeds that will count. The more the good deeds the more the rewards." Thus, in spite of deeply rooted poverty that is hindering giving, local philanthropists in Malindi continue to give because it is a religious obligation. Islam teaches to "give what we love." The Qu'ran asks all Muslims to "give from the good not the bad." "Give more and get more blessings."



## The Strength Within

The philanthropic spirit that motivates giving in Malindi has its greatest strength in its religious background. The deep conviction to Islamic norms has ensured continuous giving even when the district was reeling under poverty and HIV/Aids. There is a sense of self-denial among the givers such that they have put their interests behind those of their beneficiaries.

There is also a sense of ownership of problems, since the donors live within the community. "We give because there is nobody to attend to the needs of our community," one philanthropist said.





# Challenges

**P**ersistence of poverty means that the number of people that depend on charity is constantly rising beyond the service organisations' capacity to support them. A case in point relates to the number of idle youth in Malindi, a real challenge for MEDA. Poverty has also resulted in high school dropouts. The population of people firmly grounded in the Islamic teachings of philanthropy is also dropping. Reversing this trend is a challenge that Star of Hope's member organisations, have to rise up to.

Services rendered by Star of Hope's members are well recognised, hence the growing list of applicants for support. How to keep people's hopes alive amidst declining resources is a major challenge.

Endowment building—almost an exclusive niche for Kenya Community Development

Foundation (KCDF)—offers an option that Star of Hope welcomes. However, raising the start up capital for this venture is a hurdle that the community has to surmount.

Because of a constrained funding base, schools run by Star of Hope's member associations cannot offer competitive salaries. This means that teachers are constantly looking for greener pastures. This is not conducive to raising Malindi's education standards, which are among the lowest in Kenya.

In spite of the firm rooting of philanthropy in Islamic teachings, the reality on the ground is that project funding among Star of Hope members is declining, with donors becoming non-committal amidst rising poverty. The greatest challenge is how to strengthen the basic foundations of Islam for the good of the greater community.



Tawfiq Muslim Youth would like to offer 100 percent free medical services, especially in the area of surgical operations that call for qualified personnel who must be properly paid. Can they raise enough resources to meet this goal that is informed by growing numbers of health-seekers?

Faced with myriad problems to attend to, Star of Hope members face the challenge of prioritising. How they select and implement fewer projects with greater efficiency is a task they must rise up to. The challenge gets greater vi-a-vis rising numbers of widows and orphans.

## Lessons from Star of Hope

“The will is there, a way has to be found.” These words from a member of Al-Islam board of trustees capture the lessons to be learned from Star of Hope. Faced with daunting problems, fighting on is an inspiration to others.

- It is best for specialised groups to focus on their areas of speciality in implementing community projects.
- Donors and well wishers find it easier to give to umbrella organisations rather than individual groups.
- By appealing to the specific motivating interests in the community such as religion, an organisation can enhance giving to individuals.