



## **Our Commitment to a Just, Equitable, Diverse, and Inclusive Education Program in Kenya**

Together, CMETrust Board of Directors and Kenyan Field Representatives have developed and endorsed this statement on our approach to decolonization, and our work to implement a just, equitable, diverse, and inclusive education program in Kenya.

CMETrust has always been committed to decolonization, dismantling white supremacy in north-south partnerships, and implementing an inclusive and equitable approach that responds to the needs and aspirations of the community we serve. We were actively practicing “human-centred design” and “doing development differently” long before these terms became common, though naming these approaches never felt really important until now. The conversations that are thankfully evolving around the world about the damage caused by power asymmetries are ones we are having too. CMETrust is challenging itself to better identify, articulate and act on the barriers and injustices directly or indirectly faced by the individuals and marginalized communities with whom we interact.

CMETrust was established to amplify (and fund!) existing community efforts to uplift one of the most impoverished and ignored communities in Kenya, the Mathare Valley Slum\*. Despite some of the highest population density per square-kilometre in the city of Nairobi, with hundreds of thousands of residents, Mathare has been chronically overlooked and underserved by governments and international donors. And so, in 2006, Mathare community members came up with the idea for CMETrust, identifying the lack of access to secondary education as both the largest contributor to the cycle of poverty *and* something tangible that could be changed.

CMETrust has always resisted the title ‘international development organization’ recognizing the neo-colonial attitudes and imagery it can elicit, and given the system of perverse incentives it can sometimes entrench, whereby the wealth of a few becomes dependent on the sustained economic disadvantage of others. Instead, CMETrust’s preferred position is one of providing direct aid to fill what is hopefully a temporary gap, until Kenyan government priorities, policies, and education budgets eventually eliminate the need. At CMETrust’s 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary we set our sights on being 100% Kenyan-led, run and funded by our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. To that end we are actively working to fully decolonize ourselves by ‘leveling the playing field’ as much as possible.

The CMETrust board takes its program guidance from our Kenyan colleagues, and not the other way around. This is essential for our success, as we understand the risks that come with leveraging the privilege and intention of a historically mostly white, upper-middle class donor base. While Canadian law mandates the Canadian Board to maintain “direction and control” over Canadian tax-receipted donations, how to best direct these precious resources on the ground is always a conversation led by CMETrust’s Kenyan Field Representatives. The original idea for CMETrust came from the community, and that has been our guiding principle ever since.

\*We use the word “Slum” intentionally, as directed by our Kenyan Field Representatives.

## **Our Approach in Action**

After our first year of operations, CMETrust founders met with scholars and their parents/guardians to gather feedback. We heard deep concern that when their children returned home to Mathare between terms they would be “lost” to “bad habits” and “negative influences”. From these conversations came CMETrust’s unique and highly successful school-break activities program. This complementary training, capacity-building and development program is offered to CMETrust scholars three times per year (April, August, December). Sessions include sexual and reproductive health, leadership, first aid and fire safety, entrepreneurship and public speaking, and many more.

In 2010 CMETrust’s first high school students began to graduate - an inspiring milestone moment. However, at this time it was once again the community who expressed concern about the growing difficulty of finding a good job in Kenya with only a high school diploma. Identifying this gap in our programming led CMETrust to pilot, and then adopt our post-secondary program. It was also our scholars and their families who identified the need for our additional computer training certificate program for secondary school graduates before they embark on post-secondary studies.

Despite our small size, CMETrust has been a leader in diversity and inclusion in Kenya - a country at times heavily divided along tribal lines. CMETrust welcomes students from various backgrounds, tribes and religions. Our recruitment now expands to nearly all of Mathare offering access to education to as many kids as possible. We have diversified the secondary boarding schools seeking partner schools in various traditionally tribal regions of the country, in a deliberate attempt to be more inclusive and attract applicants from across tribes. And from the beginning we have actively sought gender parity in our scholar population.

Knowing numerous barriers to success and leadership persist for women in Mathare, CMETrust actively incorporates gender equity in our policies and our work. CMETrust was one of the first scholarship funds in Kenya to allow pregnant students to continue their studies or to take a temporary parental leave and then return to school. In 2019 CMETrust launched a “girl talk” initiative, programs and interventions to meet the specific needs of female scholars. Our programming continues to evolve as we look more closely at accessibility barriers for students with disabilities, as well as the impact of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in a country whose current President still refuses to accept LGBTQ+ rights as human rights, and where dominant religious leaders still adamantly oppose same-sex marriage.

In Canada, CMETrust is also actively working to diversify its Board of Directors, seeking to recruit and engage more of the Kenyan or East African diaspora, as well as individuals from diverse communities in Canada. The process of decolonization is a long one, which requires internal and external work, but CMETrust is committed to it. Our constant evolution, ability to pivot (way before it was the newest buzzword!), grounding in the community, and core values, set us apart and allow us to move the bar forward... join us! We welcome your feedback - [email us](#), or find us on social media.

Heather Arnold  
President, CMETrust