

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# How distance and technology affected philanthropy in Kenya: A review of the journey of Harambee

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## Abstract

This paper studies how a form of African philanthropy practiced in Kenya known as ‘Harambee’, which loosely translates to “pulling together,” has changed over the four commonly distinctive periods (epochs) in the country’s history. It argues that increasing physical and psychological distance between giver and receiver occasioned mainly by internal and international migration has changed the approach to Harambee. In addition, the analyses establishes the interplay between distance and technology affects, what, how, and why people give. The study finds that technological advancements moderate the effects of physical and psychological distance and review the mode and scope of giving, while migrations combined with technology create a ‘new sense of communities’, thus expanding the meaning of psychosocial distance.

**Keywords:** Harambee; African philanthropy; Distance; Migration; Technology.

**JEL classification:** H2, 01, C33, 055

**Article history:** Received: September 21, 2023 || Accepted: September 17, 2024

## 1. Introduction

There is a longstanding academic debate centered around the why, who, what, and how of philanthropic acts of individuals (Schnurbein, Rey-Garcia, & Neumayr, 2021; Barman, 2017; Adolf, 2016; Bekkers & Wiepking, 2012). In recent years, there has been an increased interest in how philanthropy is being shaped within specific geographic areas, with academic interest in African philanthropy being on the rise (Murisa, 2018; African Grantmakers Network, 2013). Various studies exist on the interaction between social distance and people’s response to their perceived obligations to others in philanthropy (Touré-Tillery & Ayelet, 2017).

The interest in the changing landscape of philanthropy can be partly explained by processes of decolonization in general and international development in particular. Instigated by this debate and the resulting processes of change, there is increased attention to local resource mobilization. This is also fostered by shrinking civic space, limiting the room to manoeuvre for international civil society organizations in multiple African countries (Civicus, 2020). Both developments make it an increased priority for African civil society organizations to strengthen their (financial) position, in particular, implying that they rely strongly on local resources. All this makes a current understanding of how critical philanthropy is being shaped in the African context; both for academics who study the developments, and policymakers and practitioners who must respond to the changing landscape.

We carry out a systematic literature review to explore further how changes may have occurred in the philanthropy practice, with a focus on Harambee in Kenya. This study aims to respond to the research question: How have distance, (and migration), and technology influenced the practice of Harambee in Kenya in the period before and after independence? The study also aims to contribute to the earlier explained debate by focusing on a specific context of philanthropic (giving) tradition. We study how the tradition of Harambee in Kenya has taken shape through time, with reference to Kenya as the case study. Understanding what has changed in the identity of Harambee can stimulate further academic discourse on what those changes mean to the future of the practice. It can also guide policy on how the behavior of the givers has influenced how it is practiced over time.

Through our research, we aim to contribute to the body of knowledge on the subject and close some gaps in the existing literature. There is limited literature on the dual and three-way interactions between philanthropy, distance, and technology, specifically examining Harambee in Kenya. This study thus seeks to deepen knowledge on the subject with case studies on how technology has improved on the one hand but also introduced new risks to Harambee mainly on matters of transparency and accountability.

The study is significant as one of the first analyses of Harambee using a historical perspective. It delves into how the practice has changed, and the drivers of change to come up with a contemporary understanding of Harambee and the role it plays in current Kenyan society. It is possibly the first time, a study of this kind has examined the dual and triangular interaction between technology, distance (physical and psychological), and philanthropy, with a case study of Harambee, an African philanthropy concept practiced in Kenya.

## 2. Research design and methodology

A systematic desk review was conducted through internet search engines Google Scholar and Google Search guided by (a combination of) the following keywords: Harambee; African philanthropy; local resource mobilization; giving in Africa (Kenya); philanthropic policy and legislation; migration; Kenya's demographic changes; technology; diaspora remittances; and private sector philanthropy. The search generated over 70 academic journal articles, periodicals, published reports, and references. Of the documents reviewed, nine (9) materials were nonacademic, such as World Bank Economic Review reports; NGO Coordination Board Annual Performance Reports for 2019, 2020, and 2021; and East Africa Philanthropy Review Reports 2019, 2020, and 2021; Kenya Community Development Foundation's Change the Game Academy project documents and reports for 2020/2021; Government of Kenya economic reviews; MChanga Performance Review Report for 2022; Private Sector Philanthropy reports; national policy documents from various dates; and newspaper articles and blogs stories. The remaining 57, articles were from referrals, online academic journals, online university libraries, and online publications available on the Internet and were adequate to support the study as they spanned the period before and after independence in 1963 to date. The search followed multiple layers of references and reviewed works over a period, interacting with the older articles to the most recent ones and noting updates and changes. All articles that could only be found in abstracts as there was limited or no access to libraries to ascertain their authenticity, origins, or authorship were left out. Key themes, trends, and patterns were analyzed and extracted, focusing on how distances (physical and psychological), technology, and migration have affected Harambee as a philanthropic practice over time. Connections between drivers of distances, technology, and the Harambee were explored, allowing for an in-depth analysis of the research question and objectives. A chronological listing of all the journals and documents reviewed is provided in the reference section of this paper. The scope of the literature review is all existing and relevant academic literature and publications on Philanthropy in Africa, with a specific focus on Kenya's Harambee philanthropic practice. We examine the last 60 years covering the period before Kenya's independence in 1963 to date, recognizing key moments i.e. epochs. This is supplemented by government and development

reports.

### **3. Harambee in Kenya and the Region: An Overview**

Loosely translated to mean, “Let us all pull together”, Harambee is a Swahili word and a slogan. The word is said to have Indian origins and is believed to have been used by Indian railway workers to invoke the divine energy of the Hindu god – ‘Hare’ and a Hindu goddess – ‘Ambe’ (Mbithi & Rasmuson, 1977). The porters used it when rallying each other to lift heavy loads during the construction of the Kenya-Uganda railway line (Ngethe, 1983). Harambee has been deeply embedded in Kenya’s socioeconomic and cultural landscape since the pre-colonial period and has played a significant role in local resource mobilization. Conservative estimates place Harambee’s contribution in Kenya at over 30% of all development investments between 1963 and 2020 (Moseki, 2020; Hill, 2021:).

According to Mbithi and Rasmuson (1977), Harambee is a term used in the discussion of economic and social development in Kenya just as similar concepts documented predominantly in African countries such as "Ujamaa" in Tanzania, Ubuntu in South Africa, and "humanism" in Zambia. Harambee “embodies ideas of mutual assistance, social responsibility, joint efforts, and community self-reliance (Chieni, 2001). The ‘spirit of Harambee’ is a concept that defines the traditional principle (way of life) that has existed for most if not all native communities in Kenya (Chepkwony, 2008). According to Mwendu et al (2020), Kenyans are a giving people and generosity is not just at the core of their hearts but a patriotic pact with their nation. “Service be our earnest endeavour” is a pledge promised in Kenya’s national anthem, delivered through Harambee. Mwendu et al (2020) go on to say that for Kenyans, a Harambee represents an unwritten law of generosity, and regardless of class, ethnic group, gender, or religious background, we will lend a hand to assist anyone in need. Harambee is similar in its philosophies to Ubuntu, which exhibits an overarching philosophy of black people of Africa named differently in African communities and languages.

Zoogah et al (2015), aptly summarize Ubuntu’s distinctive features which are similar to Harambee as community members sharing resources and supporting each other in exchange for unquestioning loyalty; demonstrating caring, respect, and compassion. These are aimed at ensuring high-quality community life; and creating networks of social obligations that link people to extended families, villages, and ethnic groups. Harambee spirit also sets foundational and long-term relationships that are personalized. (Mangaliso, 2001). Due to the predominance of patriotic motivations, the Harambee concept resulted in the willingness of people to give to ‘unknown’ fellow Kenyans as illustrated by communal projects such as the construction of homes, schools, and other public good facilities.

In his inaugural speech upon becoming Kenya’s first president, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta said ‘... but you must know that Kenyatta alone cannot give you everything. All things we must do together to develop our country is to get education for our children, to have doctors, to build roads, to improve or provide all day-to-day essentials. I give you the call- Harambee!’ (Ngau 1987). Harambee became, perhaps as a result of this fostering, an important concept, not only for the provision of the goods and facilities involved but also as a basis for the social and political structure of the country.

On the electoral politics front, the euphoria of independence in 1963 primed voters to expect rapid economic development and to view legislators primarily as links to central government resources (Burkan, 1979). However, the government lacked the fiscal and bureaucratic capacity to meet constituency-level demand for development projects (Bradshaw, 1993). In response, founding President Jomo Kenyatta championed “a development strategy based on the spirit of self-help” (Mwiria, 1990), which became the Harambee Movement (Mbithi & Rasmuson, 1977). A political culture quickly bloomed around Harambees whereby politicians signaled effort through fundraising towards public goods and services in sectors as diverse as education, healthcare, agriculture, and general infrastructure development (Opalo 2021).

Harambee as a national culture manifested across political, social, and economic spheres (Ngau,

1987; Kanothi, 2008 & Waithima, 2012). It inspired projects aimed at delivering public goods such as schools, health centers, and conservation projects or helped disadvantaged individuals to access services through payment of fees, medical bills, pre-weddings, and meeting funeral expenses among others. Chieni (2001); Chepkwony (2008), and Ngau (1987) aver that indeed, most of the academic work on the Harambee movement has focused on its importance in these latter two spheres and that after independence, the government made attempts to integrate and direct this tradition into the development processes.

Berman, Cottrell, & Ghai, (2009) estimated that in the period 1964 to 1984, about 37,300 Harambee projects were completed with a comparable value of 12% of the gross capital formation; and between 1963 and 1976, about 40% of the capital development in rural areas was attributable to Harambees. At its peak, the Harambee system contributed more than 30% of development expenditures between 1965 and 1984. On average, 90% of contributions came from private individuals, 5.7% from government assistance, and 4.2% from other sources (private firms, foreigners, and non-governmental organizations). The trend here shows that even while the Kenyan economy was young but steadily growing, Harambee remained a prominent means for mobilizing development funds locally.

Harambee is not just Kenya's official motto. It helped to shape the nation after British colonial rule (Mwende, 2020). Mosefi (2020) argues that Many pre-colonial African societies were governed by philosophies that ensured societal harmony and cohesion; where everything was shared and everyone safeguarded the well-being of the greater good; parenting, disciplinary action, and food were communal. The idea of Harambee was therefore nothing new. Mosefi (2020) continues to state that Kenya's early leaders had to address serious national problems including; poverty, disease, low literacy levels, and lack of infrastructure. He further avers that Harambee was key in the early stages of the country's development - "Harambee mobilized Kenyans who used it to tackle shared problems by pulling and acting together. The communal self-help concept established the basis of the Harambee movement in Kenya and grew out of the experience of the indigenous cultures where there was a tradition of communal ownership, especially of land, and decision-making (references). Fowler and Mati (2019), and Aina (2013) posit that philanthropic acts in Kenya are founded on objective customary adaptations dating back to the pre-colonial era.

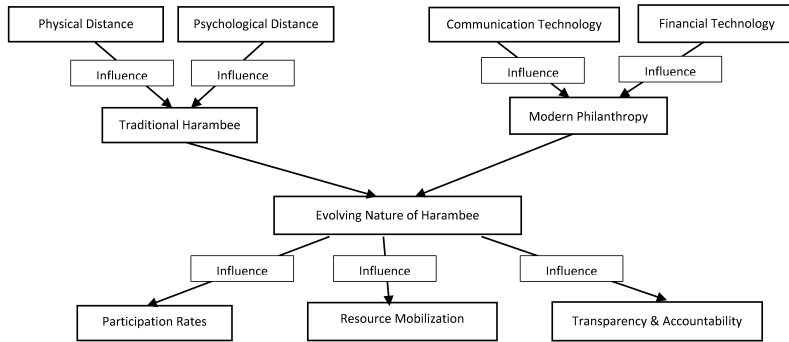
#### 4. Analytical lens

Out of the literature review, we examine the arguments and the applications of key terms and descriptions, and we form a basis for the application of the key terms, concepts, and definitions. The section sets the basis and meaning of the application of the words: Harambe, Technology (communication & financial), Psychological, and Physical Distance. Harambee the Swahili word meaning "pulling together", is used to describe a form of community self-help and collective effort in Kenya (Ngau 1987). We derive the definition from the concept of 'pulling together' by associating it with the application of 'physical distance', while emotional closeness means 'psychological distance'.

We adopt these simple definitions and apply them in the discussions that follow. Through a structured review of the definitions, we examine the transformations that may have occurred in Harambee as a result of changes in the two separate lenses of distance and technological advancements and interrogate how various elements of Harambee as already been identified especially why, what, and how people give may have changed or remained the same across the period. In the analysis, we split the entire period from pre-1963 to 2023 into four commonly distinctive periods (epochs) in Kenyan history to understand the key contexts and characteristics of each period and the factors that influenced Harambee.

We start from the early results of the analysis of the academic debates and distill the key concepts and elements. We conclude that a further and systematic review of the key elements of technology, distance, and migration will confirm their influence on the shape of philanthropy. This expectation

is framed in a conceptual model (figure 1), in which we suggest that by looking at participation rates, outcomes of resource mobilization, transparency, and accountability for the various players across the commonly distinctive periods (epochs) in Kenyan history, there is evidence of the effect of changes in the shape of philanthropy over time.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Model: Perceived Outcomes of Distance and Technology Changes on Philanthropy in Kenya

This conceptual model (figure) illustrates the perceived interactions and impact of distance(s) and technology on philanthropy in Kenya. The perception comes as a result of a systematic review of available data and information, focusing mainly on the evolution of Harambee over and along four epoch periods. Each of the factors necessitates an essential set of questions around the confluence between distance, migration, and technology in shaping Harambee over time. The interactions are broken down into Distance (physical and psychological) and how it is perceived to impact the accessibility and immediacy of traditional Harambee, which is to a great extent, dependent upon profane vicinity. The philanthropic outcomes of distances are assessed in the case of communities according to their effect on the communities over time and how they coped with the challenges of keeping relationships together when members were spreading out. Migration is considered and examined for the perceived changes it may have introduced into the traditional community structures, thus requiring more formalized and technologically supported forms of collective actions. Technology is examined for the perceived opportunities it provided migrants (physically and psychologically distanced persons) to remain engaged and to enrich Harambee from a distance. It is also examined for the extent by which it is perceived to have simplified the shift from original to modern Harambee making communication, coordination, and financial transaction distanceless. It is also examined for the opportunity it may have created for larger groups or populations or management of the Harambee funds to be taken away from the public domain – privatization of philanthropic transactions. It is also examined for how it may have allowed for wider participation and greater transparency in how funds are collected and distributed. It is held that in the pre-independence period, Harambee was more localized in this period during which proximity was a major consideration that promoted the view that people were theoretically involved in community activities. In the post-independence period, Harambee would be expected to reflect the aftermath of changes that had taken place over time with the key variables of technology, migrations, and distance taking a share of responsibility, hence the reference to the evolving nature of Harambee which is the result of continuous adaptation and response to the changing social, economic, and technological landscape. Philanthropic Outcomes are the perceived changes in participation rates, the ability to mobilize resources efficiently, and the level of transparency and accountability in philanthropic activities. The arrows in the conceptual framework show the direction of the perceived influence and denote how distance (physical and or Psychological) and technology would impact both traditional and modern philanthropic practices, in turn leading to changes in the nature of Harambee and influencing outcomes in Kenyan philanthropy.

Building on Zoogah et al. (2015) and Moyo, (2011), who argue that philanthropy is inherent in African society, and is exhibited during occasions when communities have to pool resources together to support each other in both celebratory events like marriage and solemn occasions such as funerals. Our contribution to the academic literature and debate are reflections on the structure, form, and mode of Harambee and how these may have changed because of two main factors. First, the widening distances between the giver and receiver; occasioned by people migrating, potentially expanding the philanthropy landscape. Whereas giving and receiving were previously known to have been confined to family and immediate neighbors, it is now expected to have extended to wider geographic and social circles. This is especially so because of the drastic changes that have occurred in geographical and psychosocial distances in the 20th and 21st centuries, because of large-scale migration as well as other socio-political and economic changes (Murisa, 2018; Mati, 2017). Whereas Singer (1972) argues that distance does not matter when it comes to philanthropy, we strongly believe that distance matters in philanthropy, participatory rates, giving, and fundraising outcomes. Secondly, the emergence and increased uptake of technology is not only expanding associations but has also changed the modes of communication, giving and receiving. Both distance and technology have played out differently at four distinctly unique historical periods of Kenya's history: the pre-independence (before 1963); the first post-independence period (1964 – 1983); the second post-independence period (1984– 2003) and the millennium (2004 – 2023). This segmentation of this paper into the four epoch periods is based on Nasong'o, Amutabi, and Falola (2023), as well as Askwith (1995) who all see 1963 and 1983 as major turning points in Kenya's socio-political and economic history. Furthermore, we consider 2003 as another turning point for Harambee because it marked a major policy and legislation shift in Harambee (Waiguru, 2016), as will be discussed in the next findings section.

## 5. Findings

This section presents the findings and discussions from the systematic literature review. The findings are segmented into four commonly distinctive periods of Kenyan history: - pre-independence (before 1963), the first post-independence period (1963 – 1983), the second post-independence period (1984– 2003), and the millennium (2004 – 2023).

### 5.1 *The Pre-Independence Period: A gradual increase in distance and the introduction of cash*

A key feature of Harambee in this epoch period is reciprocity, whereby, the giver and receiver exchanged roles at different times, placing both givers and receivers in one "philanthropy basket". The application of reciprocity norms in Harambee at this point was both direct and generalized. Direct reciprocity involves a one-to-one exchange of favors or actions between individuals (Mligo, 2021; Burger, Sanchez, Imberi, & Grande, 2009). For example, if someone helps another with a task, the beneficiary is expected to help them in return when they need assistance. The generalized reciprocity on the other hand goes beyond one-to-one exchanges as it involves giving without expecting an immediate or specific return, rather, individuals trust that their generosity will be reciprocated in the future, either by the same person or within the community (Burger, Sanchez, Imberi, & Grande, 2009). The latter is more prevalent in close-knit communities contributing to a sense of communal well-being. These norms play a significant role in shaping social interactions and participation rates, as they establish expectations for fairness, cooperation, and trust among individuals and groups (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2012).

This study reviewed the literature concerning the major theme of this specific epoch period: - the distance between the giver and receiver and the role of technology. In the pre-colonial period, most Harambee initiatives concentrated around the immediate neighbourhood. According to Moga (1984), this could be attributed to notions of belonging, whereby individuals conceived of themselves as belonging to a family first, a clan second, and a tribe last. Considering that most people lived within their native homes. Moga (1984) argues that philanthropy was limited to the homesteads

and surrounding groups, with the priority graduating inwards incrementally, from the tribe, clan, and family. Thus, Harambee then was confined by physical and psychological distance, whereby priority was accorded to recipients in the immediate physical neighbourhood, as well as those who were psychologically close, such as family and clan members.

The colonial period witnessed three important shifts in the identity of Harambee. The first shift was related to the widening of the basket of givers and receivers. This was occasioned by expansion of (especially) physical distances, as a result of migration by individuals. Prior to the colonial era, people typically migrated in groups comprising family or clan members (Flahaux & Haas, 2016), in which case migrations only affected Harambee in the context of the wider community. However, during the colonial era, there was a shift in migratory patterns. First of all, individuals, mostly adult men, moved to urban centers and colonial settler farms in search of livelihood opportunities. This was largely influenced by colonial policies that discouraged workers from staying with their families (Anderson, 1993), and the economic realities that made it more economical for an individual to live alone (Oucho, 1979). Secondly, the migration by individuals from their native homes in search of livelihood opportunities and education was perceived to be temporary. According to Pfingst and Kimari (2021), this temporality could have affected psychosocial bonds with most individuals maintaining stronger bonds with their families, than with their neighbours at their place of livelihood activity.

The expanded geographical space between the giver and recipient occasioned by migration, coupled with the introduction of money as legal tender (financial technology), led to a new form of giving, which is also a major shift compared to the previous period. Money became a preferred mode of exchange since it had a relatively universal value (Pallaver, 2022). Thus, other than in-kind donations, time, and labour, the use of money as a form of giving gained wide acceptance during the colonial period (Moga, 1984). Another change in the nature of Harambee during the colonial period, that can be noted is the cause for which people gave ranging from general family welfare to individual, personal development. Whereas in the pre-colonial period, philanthropy was confined to family and clan welfare, colonial-era Harambee included pooling together to pay school fees for individuals, which is a component of personal development. There are inferences in the literature about Kenyans educated through Harambee in the colonial period (Mbithi & Rassmuson, 1977). However, the concept of reciprocity norms persisted even then, with the beneficiaries of school fees donations later becoming benefactors, by supporting Harambee efforts within their circles. In this regard, therefore, while the giving was extended to personal development, such was perceived to be for the benefit of the entire family, or even clan or society.

It is worth noting that towards the end of this epoch period, following Kenya's independence in 1963, there were notable shifts to more individual-level causes. There is evidence in the literature of relatively larger-scale infrastructure development projects achieved through wider community efforts towards the end of the pre-independence period. Unlike the pre-colonial period where pooling together was for the benefit of the neighbourhood, the later projects targeted larger geographic areas, denoting possible growth in the participation rates. A case example shows that in the Machakos District in eastern Kenya, the entire able-bodied population was engaged on an average of two days a week, firstly in homestead improvement and later in soil conservation work (Ng'ethe, 1983). In the neighbouring Kitui District, a majority of the population was involved in constructing 1,220 brick houses and 507 cattle sheds, as well as ridging nearly 114,000 acres of land against soil erosion (Askwith, 1995; Bear & Hill, 2021). This scenario was replicated across many districts of Kenya during the same period, whereby community members donated their time, labour, and skills (Ng'ethe, 1983). There are glimpses of the concept of distance starting to manifest itself as this review transitions into the next period.

## **5.2 The post-independence period (1964 – 1983): Institutionalisation, Politicisation and Urbanisation**

The post-independence period witnessed significant changes in the nature and structure of Harambee, arising from new socioeconomic and political realities in Kenya having attained its independence in 1963. The first major shift was the institutionalization of Harambee and its incorporation into Kenya's economic development model. During the previous epoch period, Harambee was largely individualized but later drifted towards larger scale projects of a public good nature and politically driven initiatives after independence. This was prompted by the economic and political reality that Kenya's nascent economy could not meet the expectations of nationals, who were primed for rapid economic development in the wake of the independence euphoria. The young government lacked the fiscal and bureaucratic capacity to meet constituency-level demand for development projects (Mwiria, 1999; Barkan, 1979; Mbithi & Rasmusson, 1977). To bridge this gap, the new government championed a development model that built upon the African philanthropic spirit of self-help (GoK, 1988). This model soon bloomed into a social movement – the Harambee Movement, mainly promoted by the government of Kenya. This signified a major transformation of Harambee – from short-term, small-scale, family/clan or locale-based philanthropic acts, to large-scale socioeconomic and political endeavours (Mbithi 1977, Ngethe 1983).

The Harambee movement was championed by political leaders, who signaled their effort through fundraising for public goods and services in sectors as diverse as education, healthcare, agriculture, and general infrastructure development. The pace was set by the founding president. Institutionalization and infusion into government policy resulted in a major expansion of the scale at which Harambee was practiced signifying another milestone in participation rates. Berman, Cottrell, and Ghai (2009) estimated that between 1964 and 1984, approximately 37,300 Harambee projects were completed with a comparable value of 12% of the gross capital formation. The authors further revealed that between 1963 and 1976, approximately 40% of capital development in rural areas was attributable to Harambees. At its peak, Harambee contributed more than 30% of national development expenditures (Burkan and Holmquist, 1986).

Even though the institutionalization of Harambee resulted in an expansion of the scale, available literature shows that the local focus of philanthropic acts remained the same. According to Berman, Cottrell, and Ghai (2009), and Ngau (1987), on average, 90% of all Harambee contributions between 1965 and 1984 came from private individuals who lived within short proximity to each other and to the project for which the Harambees were held. In a study of Harambee contributions in the said period, Berman, Cottrell, and Ghai (2009); and Ngau (1987), argue that only 4.2% of all contributions came from sources not directly related to the target project, while the remaining 5.7% came from government assistance. This implies that while there was an increase in the outcomes and participation rates, most of the Harambee donations were still confined to limited physical and psychosocial distances, as was the case in the pre-independence period. Burkan and Holmquist (1986) argue that even though invitations were usually extended beyond local communities, there is no evidence that the external response was significant.

The second major shift was a change in the way of giving. While money started to gain importance at independence, its prominence grew in the first post-independence period, the early instance of financial technological advancements. In this epoch, the use of money was popularized much more than during the pre-colonial period, largely because of expansion in the volume of givers and wider geographical coverage. According to Burkan and Holmquist (1986), the amalgamation of Harambee with politics and development signified the slow but rapidly changing focus of Harambee in which donations that came from outside the community needed to be portable – mainly money.

The third major shift was the politicization of Harambee, whereby, it was applied as a clarion call for political mobilization. Kenya's first president, the late Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, frequently used the Harambee slogan as a rallying call to promote a sense of national unity and development. He



encouraged citizens to work together toward the nation's progress. Politicians later used the rallying call to galvanize supporters during political campaigns and rallies. The idea of working together and pulling resources resonated with the concept of collective political action (Ngau 1987). This had both positive and negative outcomes. On the positive side, Harambee evolved from individual actions into broad-based community initiatives and now into a nation-building model through which "Harambee projects" were conceived and proposed by locals to be supported by the government, public donations, and contributions from affluent people (GoK, 1988). However, on the negative side, the political elite put to the test the voluntariness and reciprocity norms that establish the foundations for Harambee (Opalo, 2022). The political leaders used the provincial administration to coerce community members to donate to government-led projects. According to Wilson (1990), politicians increasingly weaponized Harambee and used it to sustain their political muscle and influence. By the 1980s, politicians appeared to compete on who would raise the highest amount at the expense of community members who had been coerced to contribute (Widner, 1992). In extreme cases, local chiefs and their assistants would forcibly confiscate household goods, and even livestock, in the name of fundraising (Opalo, 2022). During this epoch period, Harambee is associated with a lack of transparency and accountability, corruption, wastage, and misuse of public resources (Widner, 1992). The fourth major change in Harambee in this epoch was about the positive economic transformation of the people as a result of increased access to financial resources from employment and other economic opportunities in the early 1980s occasioned by the creation of new jobs and business opportunities in Kenya's nascent economy (Omolo, 2010). As a result, the ability and capacity to give was enhanced. According to Mwangi (2001), the employment rate in Kenya between 1964 and 1983 was less than 5%, compared to more than 30% in the 1990s, the next epoch period.

The fifth major shift in the scope of Harambee was associated with notable migration patterns. The advent of independence signaled a massive expansion of livelihood opportunities, especially in urban areas, where many people moved in search of employment and business opportunities (Oucho, 1979). Furthermore, there was a significant wave of rural-rural migration, with many people moving into the previously exclusive settler zones commonly referred to as "white Highlands" (Flahaux & Haas, 2016). The most significant aspect of post-independence migration is the relative permanence of the movements. Considering the end of movement restrictions imposed by the colonial government, Kenyans could now comfortably settle and even own property in urban areas, including the City of Nairobi (Pfungst & Kimari, 2021). However, this did not imply the severing of ties with the native home (Askwith, 1995). This, therefore, expanded the notion of home as people from different areas settled into new communities, which they now called home, by extension, expanding the scope for their Harambee practice.

However, the literature does not reveal any clear linkages between the identifying element of distance to the giver and its interlinkages with migrations, having in any way impacted the Harambee identity. People still gave to those nearby where they donated mostly in kind and cash; and supported local projects in infrastructure development such as schools, hospitals, roads, and other social amenities. All these were contributions to the government's quest for faster national development which continued into the next epoch.

### ***5.3 The Second Post-Independence Period (1984 - 2003): the rise of migration, urbanization cash transfers, and the emergence of technological advancements***

The second post-independence period saw the most significant expansion of the scope, form, and structure of Harambee due to rapid changes in distances occasioned by migration, exponential technological advancements, and socio-economic and political dynamics. We present arguments and discussions on the scenarios that show that this is the period when the Harambee identity experienced the most visible changes. This period experienced probably the steepest growth in the influence of the what, why, how, and to whom of Harambee in the context of the identifying elements of

distances and technology.

Building from the literature, we identify some of the most influential changes occasioned to the Harambee identity. In the early 1980s, there were more Kenyans in employment as the key sectors of the economy grew, compared to the previous periods (Buchmann, 1999). Furthermore, the benefits of heavy investments in education were beginning to be realized, as evidenced by the sharp increase in the number of university graduates from an annual average of less than 500 in the 1970s (Buchmann, 1999), to thousands in the year 2000. (Bogonko, 1991). This period also witnessed a growing demand for qualified labour in urban areas both in the public service and in the private sector (Mwangi, 2001). All the aforementioned developments resulted in an expansion of the philanthropy basket, signifying the growing interest in resource mobilization. More importantly, the commonly unique period may have marked the advent of the technological revolution in Kenya, which included drastic advancements in financial technology, in the banking sector that eased money transfer processes (Otieno, 2021). Innovations in the money sector, such as telegraphic funds transfers, drastically reduced physical distance in relation to money remittances.

This period also witnessed an extensive wave of international migration by Kenyans. This wave was driven by two broad push factors and one major pull factor. The first push factor was a decline in socioeconomic opportunities in Kenya in the late 1980s, prompting more Kenyans to seek greener pastures abroad (Odipo, Olungah, & Omia, 2015; Ghai, 2005). The second push factor was political oppression by the government, which led to high numbers of Kenyan political asylum seekers. The pull factor, was the perceived availability of endless educational and employment opportunities abroad, as was seen in mass media platforms, attracting many Kenyans to venture outside the country, later on being referred to as the Kenyan diaspora community. This spike in the number of Kenyans venturing outside the country is evidenced by the steady increase in the number of Kenyans living abroad, from 59,275 in 1960 to 149,445 in 1990, then an exponential increase to 1,063,036 by 2007 (Nzioka, et. al., 2015).

The sharp increase in the number of Kenyans living abroad, together with advancements in money transfer technology and processes that made remittances easier and faster, resulted in an expansion of the geographical scope of the community and by extension of Harambee. For instance, Okoth (2003) posits that cash remittances from abroad emerged as a growing means of donations as it introduced flexibility for those living further away from their communities. This explains the role of technology as a facilitator of participation rates, enabling people to give and receive across distances and to overcome the challenges of distance and migration experienced in the earlier epoch periods.

Furthermore, this period also saw the application of Harambee at a much larger scale as a model of economic development (Opalo, 2022; Bear & Hill, 2021). This was occasioned by an economic downturn in the early 1990s, and the resultant introduction of structural adjustment programs as conditionalities for international donor funding by bilateral donors and Bretton Woods institutions (Ndolo, 2023). This turn of events increased the government's focus on Harambee as a strategy to complement reduced international development financing. According to Bailey (1993), Harambee contributions between the late-1980s and 1990s grew steadily and Harambee helped in the construction of over 200 schools, 40 Health centers, 60 dispensaries, 260 nursery centers, 42 bridges, and 500 kilometers of rural access roads among other facilities throughout the country. Between January 2000 and September 2002, 761 education-related and 210 religious-related Harambee events were held in Kenya (Burlingame & Chepkwony, 2008). These events included collections for primary and secondary schools, as well as colleges, polytechnics, and universities. This is another evidence of Harambee as a key part of resource mobilization.

Ngau, (1987), Kanothi (2009), and Waithima (2012), all agree that as this national self-help culture continued to manifest across political, social, and economic spheres, it inspired projects aimed at delivering greater public goods like schools, healthcare, and conservation projects or individual

assistance to disadvantaged persons through contributions to pay fees, medical bills, pre-weddings, funeral arrangements, and local community cultural ceremonies. Communities also raised resources to maintain roads that the government or the local authority either had neglected or lacked resources to construct and or maintain (Chieni, 2001).

The role of Harambee in Kenya's development agenda was however drastically altered by a major policy and legislation shift – the Public Officers Ethics Act of 2003 (Bear & Hill, 2021), the most significant shift of this period and which would influence the next epoch too. This responded to growing claims of poor accountability in the management of Harambee funds and projects. This law made it illegal for public officials including politicians to plan and conduct Harambee initiatives. According to Waithima, 2012, and Ochanda, 2013, Harambee reverted to local community initiatives and people-to-people giving mostly for social issues such as medical bills, support for vulnerable children with education expenses, social gatherings, and direct assistance to needy persons. While the end of this epoch period experienced the onset of accelerated technological advancements, the aspects of communication technology still lagged in enabling people to connect via mediums such as mobile telephony and internet penetration, thus limiting interactions with the other elements of migration and distance. In the subsequent epoch, we explore how the rapid changes in communication technology and its interactions with migration, distance, and may have influenced participation rates in Harambee.

#### ***5.4 The Millennium Era (2004 – 2023): The rise of mobile money, mobile technology, social media, communication technology, and digital money transfers***

The fourth epoch is more of a culmination and solidification of the major shifts that had started and gained momentum in the preceding two periods. In the first instance, the enactment of the Public Officers Ethics Act in 2003 in the last epoch diminished the role of public officers from the Harambee practice. Nonetheless, in reality, public officers continued to involve themselves in Harambee (Bear & Hill, 2021). Furthermore, Harambee continued and continues to be an integral part of socio-economic development initiatives. It is however important to mention that the policy shift also served to bring back the diminishing voluntarism to Harambee. The negative element of coercion and forced contributions ended with the Public Officers Ethics Act, of 2003, (Waithima, 2012, and Ochanda, 2013). The second notable change was the exponential growth in local and external migrations by Kenyans. Increased internal migration was triggered by various internal factors, the most important being the introduction of a devolved system of governance in 2010, which opened up many towns to new internal migrants (Ngigi & Busolo, 2019). The increase in international migration has been as a result of increased globalization (Mora & Edward, 2006), as well as increased availability of employment information (Xiong, Wu, Shihai Wu, & Yan, 2020), business and educational opportunities abroad, thanks to advancements in information and communication technologies (Mora & Edward, 2006). According to the International Organization of Migration (2020), the proportion of Kenyans living outside the country increased from 2.8% in the year 2000, to 3.3% in 2015 and 3.5% in 2020. This exponential increase in migration abroad has had a big impact on Harambee, especially, participation rates due to access and reach.

The role and influence of technology is the third change that consolidated changes in philanthropy in this period. Indeed, technology has drastically transformed the how, what, why, and to whom people give. It has significantly reshaped the nature of Harambee, especially due to continued advancements in financial technology and the emergence of various other digital innovations. Probably the biggest and most influential of these innovations is Kenya's mobile telephone-based money transfer application – the MPESA – which was launched in 2007 by Kenya's mobile telephone services provider – Safaricom PLC (Hughes & Lonie, 2010). A pioneer mobile money payment system that enables and facilitates money transfers in real-time. This has now spread to more countries and regions across the world making it possible for Kenyans in the diaspora to send and receive money

with ease (Kyule, Kangu, & Emuron, 2020), compared to telegraphic and other money transfer systems that require other carriers.

Another element of technology that has profoundly affected Harambee in this period is the mass media (social media) instigated by new advancements in communication technology (Onishi, 2010). The emergence of virtual social media applications such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram, among others has drastically acted upon both physical and psychosocial distance (Wu, 2020). These applications have enabled physically distanced persons to maintain virtual contact and facilitated the emergence of virtual communities. The platforms have enabled people to maintain contact with family, make new connections, form new social bonds, and develop new psychosocial attachments, thus expanding the general philanthropy basket.

Collectively, the technological advancements have resulted in new dynamics – the evolving nature of Harambee. Social media platforms and MPESA are used for Harambee mobilization, collection, and accounting of funds. 21st Century Harambee has leveraged technology to expand the number of givers and recipients, as well as the causes for which people give. A classic example that demonstrated the leveraging of technology for a large-scale Harambee effort was a nationwide campaign to raise funds for victims of hunger in Northern Kenya in 2011. The campaign, dubbed “Kenyans for Kenya” and led by the private sector, raised a record US\$10 million in just a matter of weeks. Approximately 3 million Kenyans donated through the MPESA application, responding to appeals on mass and social media. Thousands benefited from the funds raised (KRCS, 2012).

Four important aspects of this campaign are of interest to our argument in this paper. First and foremost, the sheer number of Kenyans who responded demonstrates that giving is inherent in Kenyans and that people give not only when the recipient is known to them. This takes us back to one of the opening statements of this paper, that Kenyans have an impulsive propensity for giving, which is founded on reciprocity norms (Mati, 2020; Moyo, 2011). According to (Global Disaster Preparedness Center, 2014), most Kenyans who donated money or food to the ‘Kenyans for Kenya’ campaign did so because they expected the same to be done for them if they were in need. Secondly, social and mass media platforms have created a new community, wherein members feel some form of attachment. In this regard, therefore, psychological distance applies in the giving practice. Third, the ease of participation, whereby people were able to give even while physically away from the beneficiaries of the donations, demonstrates that technology has effectively reduced distance, making it easy for Harambee (Onishi, 2010).

The fourth important takeaway is related to the mobilization strategy, which technology has made easier. Compared to the previous periods before and soon after independence where mobilization was by word of mouth and then later by mailing letters, radio, television, and newspaper, current mass and social media platforms have become more effective and efficient strategies. In a much more recent success story, the youth in Kenya under the banner of Generation Z, raised more than US\$ 250,000 in cash and unconfirmed non-cash value in volunteer time and kind support through mobilization via social media towards their campaign for changes in governance in Kenya over three days. Some of the funds supported families affected by crowd control through injuries, lost property, and in some cases death with the settlement of bills. Nearly 40,000 Kenyans made donations on the M-Changa platform (The Star, July 2024).

Technological advancements have also resulted in a growth in diaspora giving, which is a continuum of the local tradition, a concept they grew up with in Kenya (Copeland-Carson, 2007). According to Bett (2013), diaspora remittances to Kenya from all source markets have grown substantially in recent years and have become the fourth-largest source of foreign exchange, after revenue from tea, horticulture, and tourism. Data from the Central Bank of Kenya (CBK) shows that Kenyans abroad sent \$1.17 billion in 2012, a 31% increase from 2011.

In organizing their giving to Harambee and projects back home, Kenyans in the diaspora started to formalize giving structures to continue to support their families and communities. They have

established nonprofits and foundations to harness their philanthropic potential, such as “the Kenya Community Abroad (KCA); the Kenyan Diaspora Forum Network; and the Kenyan Development Network Consortium (Copeland–Carson, 2007).

Nevertheless, while technology has brought with it, positive changes to the Harambee processes, it has also diminished the physical interactions between givers and receivers, as well as psychological closeness. The diminished in-person interactions that are characteristics of the before, during, and after independence constitute the downside of technology as the physical and emotional connections are weakening. It has also separated givers from mutual projects they donated to as compared to the earlier periods during which they were also benefactors of the same projects. This could have far-reaching effects on the reciprocity norms that have sustained the Harambee practice.

In contrast, technology has established a new means for achieving the interactions substituting the physical with digital interactions between the two actors so that people previously limited by channels for directing their assistance to people at home have since found a variety that is cheaper, faster, dependable, and reliable. The two actors offer feedback and receive acknowledgments instantly. With technology, Kenyans in the diaspora who potentially received assistance to travel abroad for studies and or other reasons can give back from beneficiary to benefactor because of technology.

## **6. Conclusions**

Local fundraising remains a critical discussion in the face of changing international development assistance. The form and model of local resource mobilization under Harambee in Kenya have changed over time. Distance and technological changes have undoubtedly affected Harambee as a form of local fundraising. For instance, with the recent enactment of the Public Officers’ Ethics Act (2003), Harambee now takes place outside the formal development structures and therefore does not receive the full and proper attention of the authorities as its potential is not accurately assessed. This underestimation has over time underrated the potential and opportunities that harnessing Harambee or philanthropy can achieve for the social economic development of Kenya into the future.

The informal and sometimes undocumented giving remains underrated and underutilized if the estimates of diaspora remittances are anything to go by. While technology can be credited with many positive attributes that have promoted and enabled Harambee and giving, it has also introduced aspects such as private attributes to Harambee practice, as donations can now be channeled privately – removing it from the public domain. The receivers are under no obligation to declare or share with others, hence affecting the perspective of transparency and accountability. The privatization of giving has thus watered down the community approach to philanthropy and diminished the ethos of giving back. There are good lessons and reasons to examine the policy environment around transparency and accountability in ways that would enhance the benefits of technology in philanthropy while moderating potential misuse and unregulated fund flows.

The quest for decolonization has empowered people mostly as private citizens, and less as communities. In the process, there is a growing economic middle class, and a shrinking voice and engagement of the majority. This raises the concern around regulation and distribution of resources and benefits of philanthropy as was always the case in the early periods before and soon after Kenya’s independence. At the time, development projects funded by traditional Harambee proceeds were invested in common projects that benefited the whole community. Distances have diluted the common interest aspects of society, in the context of migration. People are establishing new communities with mixed beliefs and understanding of philanthropy, in the process the younger generations continue to disconnect from the original principles around what, why, how, and when people used to give. It has become difficult to maintain the give-back circle (from beneficiary to benefactor) as people get more physically and emotionally distanced.

With the weak links and/or broken give-back circles, it will be a long way to break developing countries out of the circle of poverty in the wake of shifting donor and overseas development

assistance. The future and sustainability of Harambee as was practiced in the pre-independence period has changed as demonstrated by the outcome of this study.

The study focused on examining and distilling the historical understanding of how Harambee changed over time, and what the drivers of change(s) were. The paper has contributed to the ongoing academic debate on Harambee by demonstrating that technology, distance, and migration influence the practice and philanthropic outcomes in Kenya.

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