

Biography of Ann Cotton, Executive Director of CAMFED International

Ann Cotton is Founder and Executive Director of CAMFED International (Campaign for Female Education), recognised as a leading organisation in the field of girls' education and current co-chair of the UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI). While researching girls' exclusion from education in Zimbabwe in 1991, Ann observed that it was primarily poverty, not social constraints, that prevented poor families from sending their daughters to school. Determined to challenge the status quo, she launched CAMFED in 1993, supporting the education of 32 girls that year. By the end of 2006, more than 300,900 children had benefited from CAMFED's program of educational support. Under Ann's leadership, CAMFED has also trained over 10,000 young women in economic and business skills; supported the creation of over 1,000 businesses; worked with over 20,000 community activists; trained 4000 young women in leadership and advocacy; and trained over 500 young women as rural health activists who in turn reached over 100,000 young people with gender-sensitive information on issues such as HIV/AIDS and reproductive health.

In June 2007, Ann received an Honorary Doctorate of Law from the University of Cambridge in recognition of her achievements, along with Hans Blix, Richard Leakey, and Sir Nicholas Stern. She was simultaneously awarded an Honorary Fellowship at Homerton College in Cambridge. These follow earlier achievements. In 2003, CAMFED was voted UK International Development Charity of the Year. In 2004, Ann was named Ernst & Young's Social Entrepreneur of the Year for the UK. In 2005, she received a Skoll Foundation Award for Social Entrepreneurship and the UK Beacon Prize for her leadership in girls' education. She is also Entrepreneur in Residence at the Judge Business School in Cambridge. In 2006, her contribution to girls' education was further recognized when she was awarded an OBE in the Queen's New Year Honours List.

Prior to founding CAMFED, Ann worked as an educational assessor and child advocate in Lancashire, UK and taught English in London. She also studied the multi-cultural education system of Massachusetts at Boston University. She is currently an Honorary Fellow of the Open University in the UK.