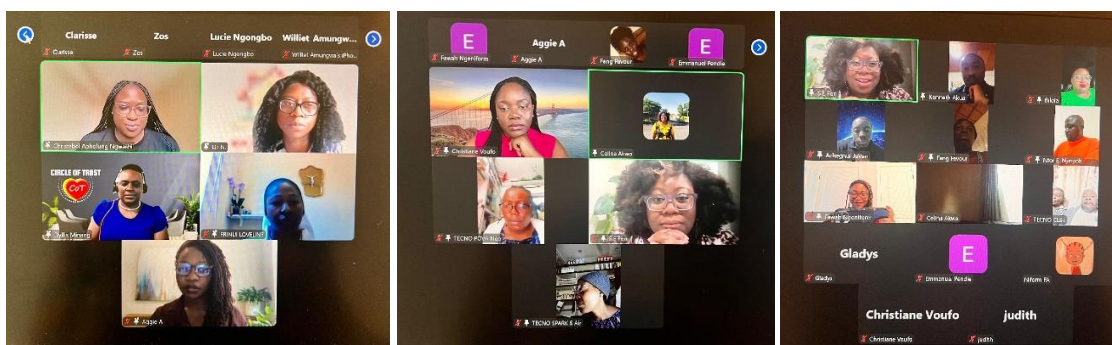




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[WEBINAR] Growing Together: Nurturing Girls and Women's Wellbeing for a Thriving and Resilient Mbeligi Community

Summary Report

Hosted by Mme Fawah Ngeniform Akwo, Founder of the [Awahsa'a Ngeniform Foundation](#), this three-session webinar event via Zoom on September 21, 2024 brought together Mbeligi (Bambili) natives and affiliates in Cameroon, the United States, and Italy to explore strategies for fostering a thriving and resilient Mbeligi community, with a focus on nurturing and leveraging women and girls' human capital.

The webinar was attended by an estimated 60 unique persons, with 28-30 persons connecting per session. Over 80% of webinar participants were women, about 25% of these connecting from Bambili or elsewhere in Cameroon. 38 persons – the majority of whom were women (over 95%)—responded to a [pre-event survey](#) and conveyed a strong desire to address critical issues facing the Mbeligi community. Their expressed topics of interest included: *healthy living, STD prevention and care, chronic disease reversal, diabetes management, parenting teenagers, mental wellbeing, the impact of digital technology on daily lives, STEM education in Cameroon, strengthening education systems, ensuring affordable education for all children, (Mbeligi) language preservation, and community empowerment*. Over a third of respondents ranged between the ages of 23 and 38, and another third between the ages of 39 and 54. Some 14% of respondents said they were between the ages of 55 and 73, and about 9% under 22 years. Men constituted about 17% of the webinar panelists, and formed around the same percentage of combined participants.



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The event featured engaging discussions moderated by Dr. Christabel Ngwashi, MD – [Session 1: Health & Wellness](#), Dr. Christiane Voufo, PhD – [Session 2: Education & Economic Empowerment](#), and Mme Fawah Ngeniform Akwo, Engr., Barr. – [Session 3: Internet Technologies and Community Action](#), with key contributions from panelists including: Mrs. Elizabeth-Jane Ngongbo, MSN-FNP-BC; Ms. Aggie Ashi – [Natural Hair Artist](#) & Entrepreneur; Mrs. Dyllis Minang, RN, PhD; Rev. Sr. Frinui Loveline – *Sister of St. Anne*, Roman Catholic Church; Ms. Shella E. Fon, MPH; Mme Augustina Akouyu – Small Business Owner, Bambili; Mrs. Celina Akwo – LEHDE Member, Former High School Teacher, South West Region, CMR; Mme Tamukum Ngelueh – High School Teacher, North West Region, CMR; Rev. Fr. Kenneth Akua, [Our Lady of Fatima Parish, Bambili](#); Ms. Bilola Fofung, Co-Host, [Two Bees in A Pod](#); Ms. Limunga Elna, Finance Analyst – [myNkwa.com](#); Mr. Nfor E. Njinyoh, Translator & Editor – [Bakwa Books](#).

Key Takeaways

- 1. Health and Holistic Wellbeing:** Discussions emphasized the need for balance across various aspects of life to achieve overall well-being. Digital tools were discussed as a means to promote health and well-being, especially in challenging times for accessing public services. *“Prevention is the best health practice,”* emphasized Dr. Ngwashi. The importance of community support in identifying and addressing challenges was also stressed. *“The work of self introspection is a priority,”* said Mme Dyllis Minang, highlighting personal responsibility in conjunction to plural efforts. Preventing and addressing gender-based violence (GBV) was a critical focus, with recommendations to address cultural factors and social norms that contribute to violence, to be sensitive to and practice zero tolerance to abusive environments—especially in the privacy of the home, to seek resources and support, including online, and to leave abusive situations before it is too late. Highlighting the complexities attached to adequately responding to GBV, Ms. Shella E. Fon noted: *“Leaving only isn’t enough, ensuring resources are in place ensures safety [of GBV survivors and affected persons].”*
- 2. Education & Economic Opportunities:** Participants highlighted the critical role of education in empowering women and girls, and likewise creating pathways for economic opportunities that benefit the whole community. Community-based initiatives like self-help groups (“njangi”), credit unions, agricultural cooperatives, etc. were lauded for their impact in providing financial assistance and mentoring for skills training and business ventures. Challenges identified in the way of education and economic opportunities for the Mbeligi community included (continued below):



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- a. Lack of awareness about available resources
- b. Limited access to funding and mentoring for small businesses
- c. Gender inequalities in the workforce

In starting to look towards addressing these challenges, Ms. Shella E. Fon emphasized the importance of leveling information asymmetries through community resource mapping, noting: *“Asset mapping is crucial. It’s about recognizing the strengths, skills and resources already present within our community. By connecting those assets to needs, we can create a powerful force for change.”*

3. **Internet Technologies and Community Action:** Panelists shared how Internet technologies including social media are extending the impact of their work, enabling for example:
- a. Increased communication and outreach. *“We can now communicate with our parishioners beyond the notice board,”* Fr. Kenneth Akua commented on how leveraging social media for evangelization and religious-based support on social issues has increased the Catholic Church’s reach into the community.
 - b. Decentralization of services and opportunities. *“Mynkwa app promotes the financial independence of young women thereby reducing environments that foster GBV and promiscuity [related to the spread of STDs],”* Ms. Limunga Elna outlined some advantages of fintech in fostering mobile savings and promoting financial literacy in youth.
 - c. Collaboration and freelance opportunities. Ms. Fofung and Mr. Nfor both emphasized how Internet tools, including digital tools for managing video media, as well as editorial and meeting tools, have greatly facilitated the ability to collaborate across boundaries, access resources online, and significantly increase productivity for enterprise.

The session also identified challenges in accessing Internet technology for girls and women, including lack of access to reliable internet connectivity, inability to afford devices, cultural barriers, and safety concerns. *“Women by virtue of their presence on social media platforms have been targets of abuse,”* a participant lamented, highlighting the need for concerted policy and community action to minimize the risks of Internet platforms.



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Recommended Next Steps

The webinar underscored the need for collective efforts to support women and girls' human development and foster a thriving community, highlighting the vital role of health, education, technology, and concerted community action. Some key next steps included:

1. Building on community insights and international best practices, develop and implement strategies to promote safe access to education for all children, including leveraging digital tools for education and skills. These should take into consideration the differentiated needs of the Mbeligi community and encourage lifelong learning.
2. Connect survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) and armed conflict with relevant resources for safety, recovery, and resilience.
3. Address harmful social norms and cultural practices that contribute to GBV. Nurture and promote healthy, loving, and equitable relationships in our community.
4. Promote awareness about mental health and access to counseling services, especially for conflict-affected persons.
5. Develop programs and initiatives to promote digital literacy skills among girls and women, including adaptive skilling as women grow older. Encourage the generation and use of local knowledge and content for learning programs and large language models (Artificial Intelligence).
6. Educate girls and women about safe and responsible Internet use. Advocate for safer Internet policies and enhanced cybersecurity to protect youth especially from harmful behaviors and to counter fraud ("scams").
7. Create a platform (series) for knowledge exchange and networking between Mbeligi women, open to the wider community, with objectives to improve personal and family wellness, education and skills, and economic security for Mbeligi and beyond.

ANNEX I: Resources

This list below compiles the resources mentioned during the “Growing Together” webinar, categorized by type and providing a brief description of relevant information. Please follow links to learn more.

1. Organizations:

- **[Awahsa’a Ngeniform Foundation](#)**:: A home-grown organization that works to support at-risk youth and community development particularly in conflict affected areas.
- **LEHDE**: An NGO that caters to the educational needs of children and young persons that lack such opportunities, alongside empowerment of its members.
- **Cameroon Ministry of Women Empowerment and Social Welfare**: Provides resources and [support to women in Cameroon](#), including those experiencing violence. Their website offers information on legal aid, counseling, and safe shelters.
- **Tubah Municipal Council**: Through their youth empowerment program, [the council provides holiday jobs annually](#) to young persons to support their education and livelihoods.
- **[Optimal Health Care Inc.](#)**: Offers fingerprints services, home healthcare, nursing staff and educational classes.

2. Websites and Social Media:

- **[Two Bees in A Pod](#)**: A podcast co-hosted by Bilola Fofung and B.E. Lyonga, focusing on Cameroonian immigrant conversations on life in the U.S.A and in general:
- **[Our Lady Of Fatima Parish Bambili](#)**: Provides information about church activities and events, and every Thursday, publishes a list of employment and training opportunities for youth in Cameroon.
- **[Bakwa Books](#)**: An independent publishing house, support Cameroonian and African literature across generations and genres from around the world

3. Mbeligi Affiliated Technical Experts (Working list):

- Please see Community Expertise at: <https://theanfoundation.org/Bambili#home>

4. Webinar Video Snippets

- Please see our social media outlets via: <https://theanfoundation.org/>



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ANNEX II: Event Flyer

Please note the current AN Foundation e-mail as info@theanfoundation.org

**GROWING TOGETHER:
NURTURING OUR GIRLS AND WOMEN FOR A THRIVING,
RESILIENT MBELIGI COMMUNITY**

*Join us via Zoom for an inclusive woman-led inaugural event on **Saturday, September 21, 2024** dedicated to empowering the Mbeligi community through women and girls' health, education, and economic wellbeing. For more information, please e-mail: theakwofoundation@gmail.com*

Session 1: Health & Wellbeing
9:00 AM - 11:00 AM (EST)

Share and participate in a safe space for actionable insights on self-care, reproductive health, relationships, and stress management. Mbeligi women leaders and experts will discuss key health issues affecting our community and a path towards holistic wellbeing.

Session 2: Education & Economic Empowerment
1:00 PM - 3:00 PM (EST)

Discover strategies for continued education and upskilling suited to the digital age. Mbeligi women trailblazers will share insights on lifelong learning, entrepreneurship, and corporate leadership. Special attention will be paid to challenges and opportunities for advancing girls' education and training amidst ongoing crises.

Session 3: Internet Technologies & Community Action
4:30 PM - 6:00 PM (EST)

In this closing session, interactively connect on how digital technologies --when properly leveraged--can strengthen women's wellbeing and economic outcomes. Explore opportunities for collective action and support systems within the Mbeligi community and beyond.

RSVP: <https://tinyurl.com/3vnfurme>
FREE Zoom Link : <https://tinyurl.com/empowerbambili> Meeting ID: 736 261 3203 Passcode: 778535