



Love is a multiplier of Resources.

Reflections by Lucy Afandi Esipila Caritas Africa Regional Executive Secretary.

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On May 10, 2023, I was elected as the first female Regional Executive Secretary for Caritas Africa by the General Assembly. The election took place in Rome, Italy, prior to the Caritas Internationalis General Assembly. A year later, I found myself in Rome again for a series of meetings. During this visit, the community of Villa de Francesco, in the province

of Belluno, Italy, invited me to receive an award on behalf of Caritas Africa. This community supports minors, young families, and individuals facing challenging circumstances, helping them live life to the fullest. They give annual awards to organizations and individuals who work to alleviate suffering.

I stayed in the city of Padova, home of St. Anthony, as a guest of Banca Etica (CRESUD). It's worth noting that Banca Etica recommended Caritas Africa for the award. On May 19, 2024, the feast day of Pentecost, I had the honor of participating in eucharistic celebrations at St. Anthony Basilica, which was a deeply emotional experience. St. Anthony, known for his love and devotion to the poor and sick, was canonized less than a year after his death. Afterward, we traveled from Padova to Feltre, where the ceremony took place.

As we entered the room where the award ceremony was being held, I was pleasantly surprised to see a familiar face smiling and waving at me. We both shook our heads in disbelief. It was the Bishop Emeritus Virgilio Pante (IMC) of the Catholic Diocese of Maralal in Kenya. You see, it was in the Diocese of Maralal where my Caritas journey began, and I spent six years learning from the local communities. This mission was where I connected Catholic faith with development, and I was grateful to the bishop for giving me the opportunity to serve the church through the Diocesan Caritas of Maralal and later through the Diocesan Radio station. This unexpected encounter with the bishop felt like a full circle moment, especially since he was also receiving an award for his outstanding work in Samburu County in Kenya, spanning a period of 40 years.

During the event, I was seated next to Mr. Gabriele Giuglietti, the President of CRESUD and a valued partner of Caritas Africa. I pointed out the bishop to Mr. Gabriele, and we both recognized the significance of this encounter. It was a reminder of how the Holy Spirit works, as this surprise occurred on the feast of Pentecost, a special day in the Church calendar. The Catholic Diocese of Maralal holds a special place in our hearts, and it was remarkable to meet the bishop at an event where both of our institutions were being recognized with awards.

Earlier in the day, Gabriele had shared with me the profound words, "*Lucy, love is a multiplier of*



resources..." and these words perfectly capture the essence of the remarkable individuals who tirelessly serve those in need. Love is a force that unites individuals, organizations, and communities, transcending distance and obstacles. It is love that allows a voice of reason to be heard amidst the current ongoing chaos and distractions of the world. The partnership between Caritas Africa and the Banca Etica group, aimed at building resilient communities through church-affiliated microfinance institutions, is

rooted in this love. It was truly a momentous occasion for an organization like Caritas Africa to be recognized for their efforts. With the little that we have, we share with those in need, empowering them to improve their financial situation. In the following paragraph, I will attempt to further elaborate on the concept of love as a multiplier of resources.

The partnership between Caritas Africa and Banca Etica was established in 2018 with the understanding that Caritas organizations across Africa are involved in various domains such as food and nutrition security, water sanitation and hygiene, disaster management, environmental conservation, and peacebuilding. It was recognized that connecting these initiatives with inclusive finance was crucial. Microfinance institutions play a significant role in providing both financial and non-financial services to local communities, enabling them to start new income-generating ventures or expand existing businesses to secure their livelihoods. In several African countries, the Church operates MFIs, and Caritas Africa aims to strengthen the relationship between these financial institutions and Caritas. Through this partnership, Banca Etica has provided low-interest loans to 4 Micro Finance Institutions: Caurie in Senegal, RIM in Rwanda, GRAINE in Burkina Faso, and Coopec SIFA in the Diocese of Dapaong in Togo, making these resources accessible to marginalized communities. With funding support from Banca Etica, Caritas Italiana, and CEI Caritas Africa, Caritas Africa plays a crucial role in facilitating the representation of these MFIs in international forums, where they can network and gain insights into organizational development and institutional advocacy. This important work contributes to Caritas Africa's overarching goal of building resilient communities in Africa. During our bilateral conversations, Gabriele emphasized the importance of the Church understanding that MFIs in Africa exist to serve the poor and the unbankable populations, and that this is where our efforts should be focused. These words beautifully illustrate how love multiplies resources.

Caritas Africa is grateful to God for his faithfulness and to the community of Villa de Francesco for recognizing our work, as well as the work of 9 remarkable individuals/organizations. It was a great honor to receive this award, particularly since it came alongside the award of the Bishop Emeritus Virgilio Pante (IMC) of the Catholic Diocese of Maralal, in Kenya.