

# WHAT IS *HARAMBEE*? AT WHAT LEVEL IS *HARAMBEE* MORE USEFUL IN SOCIAL WORK AND DEVELOPMENT?

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*Harambee* is a value of collective action in which people come together to address whole of society challenges. In short, *harambee* means societal, or coming together to address whole of society problems. The goal is larger than the group, community or institution.

## *uHarambe*

*Uharambee* or *uharambe* means coming together for the benefit of society.

## LEVELS OF SOCIAL WORK & DEVELOPEMENT

**Micro** – case, family, household or small group approaches.

**Meso/mezzo** – large group, clan, community or institutional approaches.

**Macro** – whole of society approaches.

## Origin of *harambee*

An indigenous word now part of the Swahili language. In Shona language, which contributed to creation of Swahili, *ramba* means refuse while *haarambe* means no one refuses. *Harambee* could be the ‘Swahilised’ version of *haarambe*, meaning, who can refuse to be part of it or you can not refuse to be part of what you are, society.

**Myths:** A version that says *harambee* originated from Hindu language has been discredited.

## *uHarambe* is an Ubuntu value

Ubuntu key values are:

- *ukama* (relational)
- *ujamaa* (communal)
- *harambee* (societal)
- *umvelo* (environmental)
- *uroho* (spiritual and moral)

## **HARAMBEE IN KENYA**

Popularised by the Jomo Kenyatta government which called for the society to pull together labour, resources and effort for the development of Kenya as a whole.

*In social work and development, harambee is more useful at the societal level, beyond the individual, family, or immediate community, where members of society mobilise collectively to solve problems and advance the common good. The mobilization can happen at group or community level but the goal will be societal.*

# Harambee definition from Fundi - <https://africasocialwork.net>

## Fundi – The African Dictionary and Encyclopaedia of Social Work and Development

### Fundi Version 2.0

Welcome to [Fundi](#).

Also see [Uwongo](#), a list of words that communicate falsehoods or misconceptions about [African social work](#) or [Africa](#) people and Africa in general. [Uwongo](#) means false, untrue, biased or demeaning of [African](#) values and ways of life. Unless otherwise indicated, cite information from this dictionary as follows:

Africa [Social Work](#) and [Development](#) Network (ASWDNet), (2021). *Fundi: The African Dictionary and Encyclopaedia of Social Work and Development*. Harare, ASWDNet.

**Instructions:** To view a term, go to the alphabet, look for the term, hover over it or click.

ALL 0-9 [A](#) [B](#) [C](#) [D](#) [E](#) [F](#) [G](#) [H](#) [I](#) [J](#) [K](#) [L](#) [M](#) [N](#) [O](#) [P](#) [Q](#) [R](#) [S](#) [T](#) [U](#) [V](#) [W](#) [X](#) [Y](#) [Z](#)

[Hadza](#)

[Haile Selassie I](#)

[Harambee](#)

[Harmful female genital rituals \(HFGR\)](#)



Acknowledgements: Adinkra

[Ananse ntonan](#) symbol for wisdom.

## Harambee

[« Back to Glossary Index](#)

[Harambee](#) means a societal [value](#) of [collective](#) action in which people come together as a whole society to address shared challenges and pursue common goals. It emphasises action at the societal level, beyond the individual, [family](#), or immediate [community](#), where members of society mobilise collectively to solve problems and advance the common good.

In short, *harambee* means societal, or a movement of coming together as a society to address problems.

*Uharambee* or *uharambe* means valuing society or coming together as a society.

In Shona language, which contributed to creation of Swahili language, *ramba* means refuse while *haarambe* means no one refuses. *Harambee* could be the 'Swahilised' version of *haarambe*, meaning, who can refuse to be part of it or you can not refuse to be part of what you are, society.

The extra *e* at the end of *harambe* indicates high tone or emphasis, similar to saying *haarambe!*

Other versions that *harambee* originated from Hindu language have been discredited.

Harambee is a deeper, thicker, socially embedded, morally binding and reciprocally sustained form of collective action.

# UBUNTU AND ITS SOCIETAL VALUES

*Ubuntu is the worldview of Black people of Africa from where they derive relational, communal, societal, environmental and spiritual knowledges, values and practices.*



## Ukama

RELATIONAL

*Relationships*

Guides how people relate to one another through bonds of kinship, care, and mutual belonging.



## Ujamaa

COMMUNAL

*Community*

Frames life as a shared communal project — no one flourishes in isolation from the group.



## Harambee

SOCIETAL

*Society*

Whole-of-society collective action — beyond the individual, family, or group — for the common good.

★ FOCUS VALUE



## Umvelo

ENVIRONMENTAL

*Nature*

Shapes humanity's relationship with the natural world — responsibility, stewardship, and belonging to creation.



## Uroho

SPIRITUAL & MORAL

*Moral Life*

Grounds human life in spiritual and ethical purpose — the inner compass that orients all other values.

# HARAMBEE IS THE SOCIETAL LEVEL, **WHAT IS SOCIETY?**

**Society** is the broadest human collective — the entire body of people who share a common political, institutional, and structural existence. It encompasses all individuals, groups, institutions, governments, and systems, held together by common norms, laws, and governance. Levels of modern society are: kingdom, nation, regional, continental and global.

## **Inclusive of all**

Society contains every individual, every family, and every group within it. No one stands outside of society.

## **Governed by shared structures**

Society is held together by laws, national institutions, and a collective sense of belonging to one common order.

## **The unit of harambee**

Society is the level at which Harambee operates — where collective mobilisation creates change that belongs to everyone.

## TYPES/LEVELS OF SOCIETY

**Kingdom** - could be same as national, emirate or sultanate.

**National** e.g. State of Somalia or Mauritius.

**Regional** e.g. ECOWAS, SADC, EAC etc

**Continental** e.g. Africa

**Global**

### SOCIETY

The whole — all people

Macro

All members of a society

 **Yes, *harambee***

### COMMUNITY

A specific part of society eg one or more villages, suburbs, towns, kebele, parish, ward

Meso

People sharing an identity, location, or interest

 **Not *harambee* on its own**

At the societal level, everyone is included.

# IS IT HARAMBEE? THE TEST FOR SOCIAL WORK AND DEVELOPMENT

*Not every collective action is harambee for the purposes of social work and development. For an action, initiative, or policy to qualify, it must meet all three tests — and must not fall into the disqualifier.*

## It contributes at the societal level



It strengthens the fabric of society as a whole — not just a segment, group, or sector.

## It is carried out at the societal level



It mobilises members of society collectively, beyond the individual, the family, or any immediate group.

## It develops society as a whole



Its outcome advances the common good and moves the whole of society forward, leaving no part of society behind.

## THE DISQUALIFIER

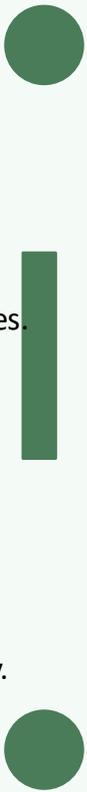


**NOT harambee if it stops short of society**

If an action benefits only an individual, a family, or a specific group — however good or worthy — it does not meet the threshold of *Harambee*.

*Harambee* begins where the whole of society is both the agent of action and the measure of success.

# EGs OF INTERVENTIONS AT SOCIETAL LEVEL

- UN Sustainable Development Goals.
  - Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).
  - Development and use of Africa Disability Protocol.
  - A borderless & passportless SADC, ECOWAS, EAC etc
  - Improving the King or Chief's laws to prevent early marriages.
  - Advocating for national law for gendered violence.
  - National land return programs to decolonise.
  - National household or village development plan.
  - IFSW/IASSW/ICSW coming together to challenge global climate change crisis or to stop wars.
  - *Umuganda* — a national mandatory community service day.
  - A global or national slavery reparations framework.
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- Kingdom survey on drug & substance social crisis.
  - Mobilising each village to come up with a livelihoods project to combat hunger and malnutrition (not one or two villages, all villages).
  - A national pension or social security program for disability or health insurance.
  - Indigenous people getting own constitutional, parliamentary, municipal or kingdom recognition & voice.
  - National reform to decolonise primary, secondary and tertiary education.
  - Anti-corruption laws, committees & enforcement.
  - Adopting harambee as a national motto (Kenya example).
  - A *gacaca* or national reconciliation program

*Interventions at the harambee level achieve social development at a higher rate, if well managed.*

# ARE YOU FEELING PROVOKED?



Our work at ASWDNet is to provoke our audience so that we all think beyond the usual, we build a knowledge base for social services in Africa that encourages debate in ways that decolonise. Join us, join the debate.