

Kuchetekela: Making

Providing quality education to most Zambian children is an expensive venture for most parents due to the harsh economic realities. A number of children, some with great potential, drop out because parents and guardians cannot afford to send them to school. Our staffer KATONGO CHISUPA reports on an organisation that is providing scholarships to boys and girls who are academically promising but financially disadvantaged.

PENIUS Mumba is a small man with big dreams. The diminutive, witty, intelligent and confident grade eight pupil at Ibex Hill Secondary School in Lusaka is one of the beneficiaries of the Kuchetekela Foundation's (KF) scholarships provided to boys and girls who are academically promising but financially disadvantaged.

He says he would like to become an engineer and at the same time a missionary when he completes school.

The KF is a non-profit organisation founded last year. It provides opportunities for students to attend excellent secondary schools.

Co-founder and executive director for the Foundation, Mrs Florence Nkowane, says the scholarship, combined with a system of mentoring, endows the children with outstanding education and guidance which is expected to empower them to contribute and compete successfully in life.

"These children have big dreams for their future careers and lives and we want these dreams fulfilled," Mrs Nkowane said in an interview recently.

The vision of the Foundation, which means, "hope" in the Bemba

language, is to provide educational opportunities to Zambian youths in order to brighten the nation's future.

50 per cent of the Zambian population is under 16 years of age. Founder and president of the Foundation, Oliver Barry, says if this glimmer of hope is not cultivated, the future of Zambia will be bleak.

He says of all of the challenges facing young Zambians, education may be the greatest.

Mr Barry came to Zambia early last year as a fellow from Princeton University in the United States.

He worked for Africare during his eight-month stay in Zambia and was attached to Chibelo School in Lusaka on an HIV/AIDS sensitisation project.

"Barry is only 24 years old but he is a young man with a big heart and you can see that he has such compassion," says Mrs Nkowane.

The Foundation says secondary education is a hurdle that many Zambians can't even attempt because of financial limitations.

While at Chibelo School, Mr Barry realised the need for enhanced quality education.

He also realised that a lot of children were disadvantaged and he decided

to start an organisation that would help.

Someone referred him to Mrs Nkowane and the process of establishing the Foundation started.

Back in the United States, Mr Barry began the process of registration. He climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro in East Africa last year as part of fundraising ventures. He does a lot of fundraising in the United States.

Mrs Nkowane says the Foundation has recognised the potential in the young Zambian population and provides promising young Zambians the opportunity of a high-quality secondary education.

The Kuchetekela places selected students at Lusaka's best secondary schools.

The selection criteria for partner schools include graduation rates, international and national examination scores, overall academic excellence and commitment to all students, opportunities for a well-rounded learning experience including arts, athletics, and other extra-curricular activities. Other criteria include support and commitment to the KF programme, Ability to guide and support each individual KF student with an emphasis on each KF student obtaining a tertiary education.

KF has so far partnered with two private secondary schools in Lusaka: Leopards Hill Secondary School and Ibex Hill Day and Boarding School.

All "KF Scholars", or applicants, fill out a detailed scholarship application, undergo a family interview

and take entrance exams at both of the KF partner schools in Lusaka - Ibex Hill Secondary School and Leopards Hill Secondary School.

For example, all participants for the 2007 academic year passed the entrance examination with impressive marks, and both of the secondary schools were eager to enrol the selected students.

Based on funding and social issues, KF accepted 10 top students (4 girls and 6 boys) into the scholarship programme.

The KF matched five students to each school, where all KF students board during the school term.

The students are selected to start in Grade 8. The KF scholarship programme is a commitment of five years, both from KF and the student, in order to support the full graduation of the selected students.

So far most of the students under the scholarship have excelled in their academic performance.

Impressed with this unique project, Stanbic Zambia Limited recently donated US\$10,000 to the Foundation (approximately K40 million) to help enhance its scholarship portfolio.

Stanbic marketing manager, Ms Irene Musonda, said her bank was an African institution that was passionate about the people of Africa and was proud to partner with the organisation, which was working for underprivileged children.

Before the children were

education available to all

taken to their respective schools, they had a luncheon with members of staff from both the old and the new schools as part of orientation.

Their parents also came along in a gesture meant to cement the relationships with all the parties.

The children who are chosen from government schools are each given mentors who provide guidance and sometimes resources.

The Foundation pays all the fees at the two schools, buys books, clothes and any other requirements.

But parents are also encouraged to show ownership of the children. They are therefore asked to buy a limited number of requirements for their children such as toothpaste and soap.

Parents are also encouraged to occasionally frequently meet with teachers, mentors, staff from the Foundation and the school coordinators.

In December last year, Mrs Nkowane was invited to the USA by Mr Barry to make a presentation on the foundation.

During a fundraising dinner here, she met a banker who introduced her to Stanbic Bank Zambia and mentioned the possibility of getting some funding from the institution in Zambia.

Mrs Nkowane who is the co-founder of the Foundation teaches history and business studies at the International School of Lusaka.

"I believe that quality education should be for everyone and not just children from rich people," she said.

