

## Meet our Queen of Beans

### Diana Zariro is Reaping the Benefits of her Labour!

It is always inspiring to hear stories of learners taking matters into their own hands and making decisions that have a positive impact on their lives as well as those of their family and their community.

In the face of hunger and hopelessness brought on by COVID-19, one such learner, a 15-year-old girl named Diana Zariro, made the decision to take charge of her future, and empower herself through her own actions.

In October 2020, due to the serious food shortages facing many families in Zimbabwe, FutureLife-Now! delivered food hampers to the most needy learners in the 10 FutureLife-Now! pilot schools. This helped the children at a critical time, as their guardians were unable to provide food while they were confined to their homes.

Diana, whose parents are communal farmers, was amongst those who benefited from this intervention. There are seven family members in Diana's

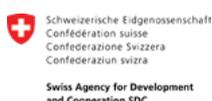


*Diana and her proud father stand in front of her successful crop of beans*

household, including her parents and siblings. After Diana received her food pack, she asked her mother to reserve the 500g packet of beans and use everything else in the hamper. Her reason was, "As much as we

needed the beans urgently for food, the packet was going to provide a single meal. Seeing that the rainfall forecast predicted good rains, sowing this packet of beans would produce more meals."

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Despite initial resistance from her family, her persistence finally paid off and her parents gave her permission to use a piece of land that had not yet been prepared for planting. She cleared the land alone and started digging it manually. Diana later invited her school headmaster, Lameck Chahwanda, to visit her and her piece of land in an effort to drum up support. She wanted to convince her parents to assist her as she did not have any fertilizer.

The headmaster met with Diana's parents and it was then that the family realised how serious she was. Although her parents could not afford fertilizer, they assisted her by sourcing organic manure instead. As predicted, the rains were good and her crop did very well.

Now Diana is determined to continue her success by saving some of the beans from this crop for the upcoming

season. This will ensure that her family will benefit from a better diet.

"When we shared her story with other learners, they were inspired and promised to break their own new grounds," said Chahwanda.

"I met with Diana on my last school visit (March 2021) and commended her for her agency and putting everything she has learnt at school in practice," said Zimbabwe's FutureLife-Now! Country Manager, Aussie Ndlovu.

"She is a true reflection of what the FutureLife-Now! programme is seeking to achieve - learner agency and for learners to be community champions. ■



*Diana has inspired fellow learners at Murape Secondary School to break their own new ground*



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## Safely in Your Corner

### The Chalimbana Clinic Youth-friendly Corner Gets Busy

Welcome to the Chalimbana Clinic Youth-friendly Corner, situated in Chongwe District in the province of Lusaka in Zambia.

A Youth-friendly Corner is a safe zone for young people. It is a place where adolescents can access health information concerning their lives, and non-judgmental services relating to reproductive health. It is also a healthy environment for "hanging out" and developing some life skills.

This Youth-friendly Corner serves young people from the surrounding learning institutions including Chalimbana University, the Local Government Training Institute, Chalimbana Primary School, and Mukamambo Secondary School, as well as youth from the surrounding villages.

"I am a person who is frank, open and able to communicate with other people," is how Vanessa Muntanga, a Grade 12 pupil at Mukamambo Secondary School, describes herself. Vanessa says that one of her greatest pleasures is interacting with new people at her local Youth-friendly Corner and learning about physical, social and emotional changes that the human body undergoes during adolescence.

Meet Eugenia Katania Chakulya, 17 years of age, an eloquent young lady who describes herself as "a leader who loves engaging people in different activities allowing them to do what they need in order to improve society".



*Loving his peer education training session at the Youth-friendly Corner at Chalimbana Clinic is 17-year-old Emmanuel Mukonda*

She is still in school but helps people by disseminating reproductive health information through handouts from the clinic.

Eugenia is committed to improving the lives of fellow youth in the community by sharing information about early marriages and teen pregnancies. She is passionate about addressing these challenges through promoting activities that teach survival life skills. "These skills will help young people support themselves when they grow up, and present themselves in an assertive manner."

Both Vanessa and Eugenia have many ideas to enhance the Youth-friendly Corner. Vanessa is planning on introducing more fun activities like drama, drills, and poetry. Eugenia

has already initiated a book club, and is full of other ideas, including empowering out of school youth with entrepreneurship training and helping them access capital to start businesses. She is also keen to introduce bursary schemes for vulnerable young people.

All young people in the area are encouraged to come to Chalimbana Clinic Youth-friendly Corner where they can have open, safe and non-judgmental conversations about issues related to their sexual reproductive health, including sexually transmitted diseases and sexual violence. Young people can also access the services of psychosocial counsellors and skilled and compassionate youth facilitators. ■

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## Overcoming the Digital Divide

### E-platforms Bridge the COVID-19 Communication Gap in Malawi

COVID-19 brought with it a serious communication challenge. Lockdowns, restrictions on public gatherings and face-to-face meetings resulted in curbs on all educational activity, including FutureLife-Now! programmes.

In response to this challenge MIET AFRICA assisted the 10 FutureLife-Now! schools in Malawi by establishing an effective e-platform solution. Each



*The handover ceremony of the e-platform at Bwaila Secondary School was met with great excitement*

school was equipped with solar panels, laptops, projectors and Wi-Fi access, allowing for online communication, meetings and workshops. This has enabled the schools to conduct virtual meetings with their own stakeholders, including learners, educators, parents, local and religious leaders, task team members and civil society organisations, as well as with one another.

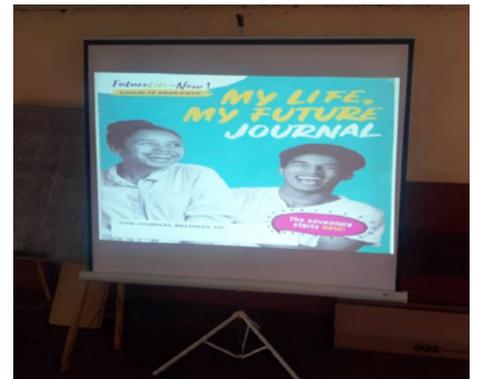
One of the schools that has benefited from the installation of the e-platforms is Umbwi Secondary School in Dedza district. Dave Mchakama is the youth facilitator at the school. He prides himself on utilising the e-platform to provide civic education to students at the school.

The e-platforms have enabled the FutureLife-Now! programme in Malawi to conduct sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) meetings with mother groups, religious leaders as well as traditional leaders.

Sheik Yusuf Jim, a religious leader at Mbinzi Community Day Secondary School could not hide his excitement when he used the virtual meeting platform for the first time to discuss SRHR issues with his fellow religious and local leaders. "We have had challenges to converse with each other amid the COVID-19 restrictive measures; as such

we have helplessly seen our young ones failing to access SRHR services because we cannot reach out to them with messages. It is like we have left them alone in these hard times. For the first time, I have used a laptop to talk to you," he said.

"Can you also connect us to these young people so that we can provide them with advisories on how they can



*The e-platform has made it easy to conduct training and workshops. Pictured is journaling training for Youth Facilitators at Umbwi Secondary School in Dedza District, Malawi*

prevent unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases?" he asked.

Plans are underway to pilot a telehealth model in both the schools and health facilities. Albert Saka, the chief officer in the Ministry of Education hailed the FutureLife-Now! programme for the innovative idea of connecting learners to health services. "The pilot telehealth model is a very welcome innovation in reaching out to the needs of our young people in schools."

"We have seen what a pandemic can do to the future of our young people. When approved, the telehealth model will indeed bridge the communication gap between students and public health services providers." ■

## Keeping Communication Open

E-platforms a Game Changer During the Time of COVID-19



*Students of Thetsane High School together with Principal Secretary: Basic Education, Dr Dira Khama, Hon Minister of Education, Ntlhoi Motsamai and CEO Secondary Mabakubung Bertha Seutloali, following the launch of the new e-platform*

**The COVID-19 pandemic presented a host of challenges to Lesotho's schooling, including its FutureLife-Now! programme, which depends on schools as entry points to reach and support young people.**

But, as in the other Future Life-Now! pilot countries, technology came to the rescue. With technical assistance from MIET AFRICA and COVID-19 emergency support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the 10 FutureLife-

Now! pilot schools were equipped with solar power, Wi-Fi and the necessary hardware (including a laptop, data projector and screen) to enable ongoing interaction. Utilizing online or e-platforms such as Zoom and MS Teams, meetings and workshops were able to continue during lockdown and school closures.

According to Rantsane Kuleile, Lesotho's FutureLife-Now! Country Manager, every cloud has a silver lining. "COVID-19 has been a game changer, in that we got to appreciate

the important role played by technology in teaching and learning. These effective e-platforms have been established to allow for online communication and capacity-building sessions both by the MIET AFRICA Lesotho in-country team as well as nurses in the nearby health facilities."

On 23 April this year, Ntlhoi Motsamai, Lesotho's Honourable Minister of Education and Training, together with the MIET AFRICA in-country team, officially launched the FutureLife-Now! e-platforms. Present at the

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launch was the Principal Secretary of Basic Education, Dr Dira Khama, and representatives from all FutureLife-Now! schools. The launch included a demonstration of how the e-platforms work.

Speaking during the launch on behalf of the schools, Malehlohonolo Mokorosi from Matholeng High School assured everyone that as teachers "we will work on sustainable measures, together with parents, in terms of data and Wi-Fi, beyond FutureLife-Now! support".

Some of the pilot schools in far-reaching areas did not have any electricity connection and thus the FutureLife-Now! solution to this challenge was to install solar power to provide the needed energy to run laptops, projectors and screens. The principal of Motsekuoa High School, Moqhali Matsela, said, "We are already using the solar panels, at

the same time saving extensively on electricity bills."

Johanna Mokhorro, principal at Semonkong High School expressed his heartfelt gratitude for the equipment and thanked FutureLife-Now! for the assistance, while an educator at Thetsane High School indicated that he is already using the laptop, projector and screen to show education videos when teaching his subjects of Maths and Science.

The platform also provides schools with the opportunity to communicate amongst themselves, share and learn across countries and continents, and benefit from engagement on the new CSTL Pulse, an online education community platform for the SADC region.

"At the end of the day, reaching young people with information even during the COVID-19 pandemic will



*The e-platforms were set up for a hands-on demonstration at the launch which officials found to be most impressive*

ensure we still achieve FutureLife-Now! Member State objective one," says Kuleile, "which emphasises increased access to youth-friendly, HIV, SRHR, and antiretroviral therapy education support and services." ■



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## Our Time to Act!

### Radio Carries FutureLife-Now! Messages Throughout SADC

**As part of a coronavirus emergency response in the four FutureLife-Now! pilot countries, MIET AFRICA developed a communication and advocacy strategy to reach young people, their families, and broader communities with factually accurate information on the virus.**

This included introducing radio programmes as a component of the FutureLife-Now! programme, because radio can be used to inform, educate, advocate and promote social learning, as well as entertain communities.

The programming included a 20-episode radio programme on COVID-19 called *Together - We can beat it*, which ran from August to December 2020; two interrelated programmes on comprehensive sexuality education in partnership with UNFPA and UNESCO which ran between November 2020 and January 2021; and a programme on climate change, *Our Changing Climate - Our Time to Act!*, developed in collaboration with UNITAR and broadcast in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe from late November 2020 until February 2021.

The four radio programmes included opportunities for listener phone-ins as well as competitions.

According to an evaluation of the radio programmes conducted in February 2021, they were well received and valued across all four countries.

The COVID-19 radio programme provided a source of critical information which aimed to prevent the spread of the virus.

A Youth Talk Radio Programme prize winner said that a programme for youth, by youth, and about youth served to empower young people, while the majority of the listeners interviewed believed that the comprehensive sexuality education radio programmes played a crucial role in raising issues that young people are shy to talk about with family and friends.

A Malawian teacher said the climate change radio programme provided him with content to supplement gaps in the syllabus, thereby building learners' knowledge. He added that the programme boosted his own interest in environmental management.

Through the evaluation, respondents commented that the variety of panellists who were able to share their expertise on issues of SRHR, COVID-19, human rights and HIV&AIDS, aided in promoting robust discussion.

It is clear from the listener responses provided by the radio hosts that the radio is considered to be the favourite source of information in all the pilot countries.

In fact, the FutureLife-Now! radio programming has proved that radio plays a vital role in restoring or building family relationships and improving



*A happy radio prize winner in Zambia, Elastus Musonda*

levels of understanding of issues affecting young people. To illustrate this point, the radio host from Malawi, Davie Majawa, shared the story of a father and his son who did not enjoy a good relationship. "The son had difficulties opening up to the father although he did this quite easily with the mother. The father reported that the Family Talk radio programme has helped to strengthen his relationship with his son," said Majawa.

More exciting and informative radio programmes are being planned for later in 2021. ■