

Mkango launches programme to uplift education standards to help empower Phalombe local communities

● Rare earth prospector presents six decorated learner-friendly classrooms to three primary schools

By Chiku Jere

Mkango Resources has embarked on a programme to uplift educational standards for the local communities surrounding its flagship Songwe Hill Rare Earth Project through, among other interventions, improvement of infrastructure and provision of learning materials to primary schools in the area.

The programme has seen the Canadian listed firm, through its wholly owned local subsidiary Lancaster Exploration, partnering a non-governmental organisation boNGO World-wide, in renovating and painting six classrooms for primary schools in the area.

The painting work involved putting artistic educational expressions depicting what is in the school curriculum to develop the classrooms into learner-friendly facilities.

Speaking at Mphembezu Primary School during the handover ceremony of the six classrooms, two from each of the three primary schools of the area namely Mphembezu, Changa and Mangazi, Mkango Resources' Country Director for Malawi, Mr. Burton Kachinjika, said the project is part of the firm's vision to help build an empowered and educated society in the area.



Mr. Burton Kachinjika

“We are building a foundation for the would-be future employees of Mkango. Our aim is to educate and train children from the area, so that when we roll-out the actual mining works, we should not go elsewhere to look for workers; rather, we should recruit from within.”

He said the company will join hands with parents and teachers in closely monitoring the performance of the pupils and make necessary interventions to inspire them to greater heights.

As a way of inspiring the pupils, Kachinjika reiterated that Mkango will grant primary, secondary school as well as tertiary education scholarships to the top performing pupil in mathematics and science subjects at each of the three primary schools.

In his remarks, a visibly excited Deputy District Education Manager (DEM), Godfrey Kubwense, was full of praises for Mkango for what he described as a visionary initiative.

“We at the Ministry of Education are really humbled and excited to have Mkango Resources invest in the sector, particularly here in Phalombe. This is a very meaningful investment and I urge all stakeholders to avoid frustrating such kind of investors because doing so will be denying our children a better future,” he said.

He said he foresees the changed classroom environment acting as a motivation tool for pupils as the expressional pictures on the wall will compliment what they learn from their teachers.

Kubwense observed that Phalombe, as a district, had few historical role models to inspire students and said that Mkango's investment in education would start to actively empower the pupils to become future role models.

He then advised the communities surrounding the three schools to shoulder the responsibility of taking good care of the

renovated school blocks so that they are not damaged by vandals. “Let us preserve this development so that more and more children will be able to use the facilities in the next ten years to come,” he said.

Headteacher for Mphembezu Primary School Charlestone Mulewa was all smiles explaining that the painting of the school blocks with educational expressions would reduce the problems that teachers were facing in terms of sourcing practical and demonstrational teaching materials.

“I am failing to express my gratitude to Mkango because I am overwhelmed with joy as regards what they have done for our school and the other schools. Teachers and pupils will find a breathing space as they will not spend time going around looking for material for practical teaching or learning any more. Every-



Inspired guests



Mr. Kachinjika flanked by DEM for Phalombe district Mr. Kubwense at the opening ceremony

thing they need has beenprinted on the walls of these blocks and we really appreciate the job well-done on the part of boNGO Worldwide which was tasked to do the job,” said Mulewa.

Other dignitaries who talked highly of the project during the ceremony included Senior Group Village Headman Maone, Group Village Headman Namalamba, Mauzi Ward Councillor as well as a representative of the Primary Education Administrator (PEA), Christopher Chazinga.

Speaking on behalf of all traditional leaders GVH Namalamba expressed profound gratitude to Mkango Resources as well as the contractor, boNGO (based on Need-driven Grassroots Ownership) for the initiative dubbed “Happy Classrooms Project.”

“There is no need for me to emphasise that in Mkango, we have found a true partner and a friend who has sincerely shown clear interest of helping us to develop our area, and we hope this will continue,” Namalamba said.

boNGO's Programme Director Justin Namizinga explained that the main aim of the ‘Happy Classrooms’ initiative is to improve the learning and teaching environments in infants

school section (standards 1,2,3 and 4) of Malawi primary schools through relevant educative decorations (paintings) on the walls.

“The objectives of the project is to provide pupils with a learner-friendly environment that helps them to concentrate better and learn faster and also to help teachers with lasting teaching aids so that their lessons can be more understandable and easier,”he said.

According to Namizinga, the renovation and decoration of classrooms has technically cut cost by 75% in terms of what the schools spent on educating the pupils.

He said the investment has a 10-year life span and would cater for two to three generations



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Clear pupil-participation and interaction



Mr. Justin Namizinga

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of pupils to come.

boNGO is a Malawian Non-Governmental Organisation which was established 2007 with the sole aim of raising education standards in the country mainly focussing on Early Childhood Development (ECD).

The organisation also addresses HIV and Aids issues through the production of awareness-raising motion pictures.

Though mine construction is yet to start at Songwe Hill, Mkango Resources has undertaken a number of corporate social responsibility (CSR) projects at the site to assist the communities in different sectors.

The CSR projects have included construction of access roads and bridges, construction of boreholes to provide portable water for the communities and donation of seeds and tree saplings to members of the communities for subsistence and commercial farming purposes.

Mkango Resources has also donated 6.7 million kwachas worth of items to 470 households in the communities surrounding Songwe who were most affected by the recent floods.