News
Ministry



Baptistine Sr. Evelyn Bwalya, the coordinator of Youth Community Training Centre, visits Tisa Mumba at her workplace, Woodlands Lodge & Tours, in Livingstone, Zambia. Mumba was offered the job as a chef after a two-month internship following her nine-month course at the center. (Derrick Silimina)



by Derrick Silimina

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When Tisa Mumba was devastated by hopelessness after her father's death, she had no option but to dream beyond her circumstances and work toward a brighter future.

Mumba, 23, opted to take a risk and migrate from Kabwe town to Livingstone, about 470 km south of Lusaka, Zambia's capital, in search of "greener pastures."

"I struggled to do odd jobs in Livingstone to survive. I plaited people's hair [and] baked cakes and scones for resale at the market. And with my little savings, I decided to enroll at Livingstone's Youth Community Training Centre (YCTC) for a short course in food production since I had a passion [for the] confectionery business," Mumba told Global Sisters Report.

In an economy stifled by high living costs and diminished purchasing power, Mumba began her studies thanks to the Zambia Association of Sisterhoods with support from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. (The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation also funds Global Sisters Report.)

She embarked on a transformative journey at the training center, where young people acquire valuable skills in electrical engineering, plumbing, electrical power, carpentry and other vocational fields.

The Sisters of St. John the Baptist (Baptistine sisters) manage the training center, nurturing young people's talents in Livingstone, a tourist town near the mighty Victoria Falls, one of the world's largest waterfalls. Built in 1999 by Celim and the Livingstone Diocese, the center is in Libuyu township.

Mumba's academic journey at Youth Community Training Centre almost ended halfway into her studies because of her inability to pay tuition fees. This further depressed her as she worked to hone her skills in food production and find a stable job among Livingstone's top hoteliers in the flourishing hospitality hotspots.

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After Mumba failed to report for the second semester due to lack of funds for tuition, the Baptistine sisters immediately asked the registrar's office to put her on a

scholarship to support her studies.

"Having lost my dad, who could have provided whatever I needed, was not easy. If it were not for the scholarship, I would have ended up in bad behavior," Mumba said.

Zambia has a booming youth population and a lack of academic support, and employability is a pressing concern among the viable but vulnerable youths, particularly amid a shrinking economy in the southern African country.

After a two-month internship following her nine-month course, Mumba's hard work and discipline paid off. She was offered a full-time job as a chef at Woodlands Lodge & Tours.

"Had it not been for the sisters' intervention, I wouldn't be where I am today. And even with what I am earning through my current job, I am now able to support my mother and siblings back home in Kabwe."

Millions of young people in Zambia are trapped in a cycle of unemployment and poverty. HIV infections, early pregnancy, gender-based violence and a host of other social ills are common.

Zambia also struggles with an energy crisis marked by relentless load-shedding that shuts down power, threatening socioeconomic stability.

Creative minds like Elizabeth Namfukwe, a young beneficiary of the training center, found an opportunity to acquire a skill and find solutions to the country's energy situation.

"I was super excited to be accepted at YCTC, especially since I was also awarded a bursary [scholarship] in 2023. It's a game-changer for my dream career," Namfukwe told GSR.



Elizabeth Namfukwe, a beneficiary of Youth Community Training Centre in Livingstone, Zambia, demonstrates how electrical appliances operate at her workplace as Baptistine Sr. Evelyn Bwalya looks on. (Derrick Silimina)

Fascinated by electricity generation in Zambia's Kariba Dam, Namfukwe saw an opportunity to become a highly sought-after electrical engineer.

After Namfukwe's internship at Dennis Turf Irrigation Systems, her exceptional performance earned her a job as an assistant technician before the attachment period elapsed.

"It was my first time at a tertiary institution after years of trying to source for academic support. Considering our country's socioeconomic challenges, I would like to commend the sisters for this skills training initiative, which will go a long way to reviving young people's dreams."

The initiative has extended its impact beyond Livingstone. Eleven congregations with skills centers across Zambia have also collaborated, aiming to empower 840

youths in the first two years of the project.

The Zambia Association of Sisterhoods has allocated funds to various skills training centers across the country, including the Holy Rosary Sisters Skills Training Centre, the Bauleni Special Needs Project in Lusaka, and St. Mary's Skills Development Centre Kawambwa in Luapula Province, among others.

"When I came here, my first duty was to look for sponsors and help many vulnerable youths finish their studies. Otherwise, if I just sit, they will not have quality training," said Baptistine Sr. Evelyn Bwalya, the coordinator of Youth Community Training Centre.



Baptistine Sr. Evelyn Bwalya at the Youth Community Training Centre near Victoria Falls (Derrick Silimina)

After working at other learning institutions with minor vulnerable youths, she was transferred to Livingstone in 2021.

Bwalya, a teacher by profession, said the skills center has more than 240 learners pursuing various lifelong skills. Since 2023, 160 vulnerable youths have benefited from Hilton Foundation scholarships, inspiring higher enrollment levels at the skills training center from 50 students per semester to more than 200. The center has a capacity of 500 students.

Bwalya, 44, finds joy in fulfilling her mission as a Baptistine sister, which follows the congregation's charism of caring for the young and the poor. She said a distinctive feature of the program was the emphasis on real-world exposure, which enabled the students to undergo practical internships at various reputable companies, lodges and hotels in Livingstone.

As the project approaches its culmination in 2024, early signs of success are evident as dedication and hard work secured full-time jobs for many youths, a testament to the program's effectiveness.

Bwalya is happy because before the Hilton Foundation's collaboration, vulnerable students couldn't pay the fees for their training, and the school couldn't buy the training materials for them.

"Now, our students can find jobs, and some are able to set up their own businesses."