

The Daily Times

Harvesting Sun to Light Education

WEDNESDAY, 23 MAY 2012 09:41 RICHARD CHIRAMBO

In poor African communities, education is one sector with too many limiting factors, from poverty and disease to lack of political will.

Use of kerosene lamp has also been identified as one hidden enemy to quality education. Our reporter Richard Chirombo writes on efforts to replace the 'koloboyi' with solar power. He writes:

Failure, ranked first on her list of undesirables, is, ironically, far from the centre of her thinking.

At the centre of her life is 'Koloboyi' (kerosene lamp), which she regards as the ambassador of failure in her life.

At 17, Ruth Saikonde, a Form 4 student at Jacaranda School for Orphans in Chigumula, Blantyre, charges that she has had enough of Koloboyi in her life.

"Koloboyi gives one a bad experience. It emits more fumes than light, contaminates clear air, darkens clothes and other household items, and, just like candles, may cause fire," says Saikonde.

She says paraffin is also expensive, and this affects her school performance.

The Koloboyi can, at times, misbehave by not working the way the student wants. That's where the issue of Projective Identification- a psychological mechanism originally identified by Melanie Klein (1946) in which we transfer our thoughts, feelings and emotions onto someone or something else – comes in.

"You wish you could smash the Koloboyi at times, when the fume gets to you," she said.

That could explain the 2010/11 MSCE and JCE examinations' pass rate at Jacaranda: 58.9 percent for MSCE and 78.9 percent for JCE candidates. Koloboyi can destroy academic progress.

But, with less than eight percent of the population yet to become part of the national electricity grid, do people really have a choice?

Chirambo, Richard. "Harvesting the Sun to Light Education," *The Daily Times*. May 23, 2012.

FRIEDMAN BENDA 515 W 26TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10001
FRIEDMANBENDA.COM TELEPHONE 212 239 8700 FAX 212 239 8760

"We have so many choices and opportunities in Africa. We find these in the many natural resources we have. We (Africans) are rich in so many ways," says Amos Burundi Wemanya, the projects coordinator for Sustainable Development for All Kenya (SDFA-Kenya), a Kenyan NGO.

Wemanya has, between January and May 2012, been travelling between Malawi and Kenya on a mission to rid Malawi of the 'nasty' Koloboyi.

The trips are a result of a 2010 meeting between Marie Da Silva, founder and president of Jacaranda School for Orphans and SDFA-Kenya's founder, Evans Wadongo.

Da Silva, who founded Jacaranda in 2002 after hearing reports that the only public primary school in her mother's village was closing down, was in 2008 recognised by the American news channel, CNN for her compassion for vulnerable children in Malawi.

Likewise, 26-year-old Wadongo was, in 2010, recognised by CNN. His invention of solar-powered lamps for poor communities long-used to the Kenyan version of Koloboyi was noticed by CNN. Today, Malawi and Uganda have also joined this war against Koloboyi.

This meeting between Da Silva and Wadongo is behind Wemanya's zeal to answer a 'Malawian' question.

"Africa is lucky; we are blessed with an abundance of the sun. This is ideal for solar-powered innovations.

"We can simply 'harvest' the heat from the sun, and give light to vulnerable members of our society. The solar lamp doesn't produce smoke, saves people from in-door pollution, reduces our contribution to climate change through reduced gas emissions, and saves us from unnecessary fires," Wemanya says.

This, though, is not an exhaustive conglomeration of Wemanya's charges against Koloboyi. He adds that the solar lamp, which 'walks' a distance of seven hours into the night when fully charged by the sun, helps children avoid "accidental swallowing of paraffin".

On these grounds, Wemanya has been drilling Jacaranda children in solar-lamp making. On Wednesday, May 16, those preparing for MSCE and JCE received solar lamps to light their prospects of excelling. The children had made the lamps themselves, with one of them designing her own prototype.

Da Silva, so touched with Wemanya's work, was left speechless.

"These children, 95 percent of whom are orphaned by HIV and Aids, will take 'a lot of you' when they go. These children, as orphans, need that 'second parent' to inspire them and help them see the future. It makes a huge difference in their lives," she said.

She had time for the children, too. "You just listened and made it with your own hands. We have learned how to take; we will now learn how to give. We want to be making these lamps and distributing them to vulnerable community members for free," Da Silva said.

Renowned writer and economic commentator, Desmond Dudwa Phiri, took some time off his Trade Fair grounds office to appreciate this new invention. He was glued to his chair, silent and still. But, when Saikonde mentioned Koloboyi, something happened to his mind.

"I remembered my youthful days. I had bad experiences with *Koloboyi*. We did not have our own universities then; so, those who wanted to progress with their education could either go to Uganda or Tanzania. I went to Dar e salaam and studied for a degree using Koloboyi.

"It was terrible using *Koloboyi*. Very poor light. You, sometimes choke from the fumes," Phiri reminiscences.

He says modern youths should embrace new solar technologies to improve their lives.

But Koloboyi is not the only challenge for Jacaranda children. The Jacaranda School Band, led by Davie Million, has a way of summarising all of these challenges. The song 'Education' talks a lot:

***Ndife ana amasiye
Zovuta zathu ndizambiri
Koma tikaphunzira bwino
Umasiye wathu udzachepa.***

(We are orphans, with numerous challenges. But, if we get educated, our problems will be lessened)

Then, as if seeing an answer in solar lamps, they sang, through the song 'Light up Jacaranda':

*(Now) We can read
We can see.
With solar energy,
We can make it.*

But this can happen if they take heed of Phiri's plea not to 'waste time crying over your vulnerability' by embracing solar power and let the sun light the darkness in their lives.

Their problems, as Thomas Hardy observes in his 1898 poem, 'First or last', should point to greater prospects.

*If grief come early
Joy comes late,
If joy come early
Grief will wait;*

Chirambo, Richard. "Harvesting the Sun to Light Education," The Daily Times. May 23, 2012.

FRIEDMAN BENDA 515 W 26TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10001
FRIEDMANBENDA.COM TELEPHONE 212 239 8700 FAX 212 239 8760

Aye, my dear and tender!

As the students sing at the top of their voices, and work on their kerosene lamps, you are left with no doubts that paraffin lamps, could soon be out of the way for the brighter and safer solar power.

Chirambo, Richard. "Harvesting the Sun to Light Education," The Daily Times. May 23, 2012.

FRIEDMAN BENDA 515 W 26TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10001

FRIEDMANBENDA.COM TELEPHONE 212 239 8700 FAX 212 239 8760