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LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, GOOD MORNING.

A historic day. Cutting the ribbon, made my dream come true.

But let me take you back to June 2001: Almost 20 years ago.

By coincidence, I landed in Mpongwe in the bush.

That time Mpongwe was no more than a small village, with a hospital, a primary school, some churches, a market, surrounded by small mud huts with thatched roofs.

I stayed for 6 weeks in the guesthouse of the Mpongwe Baptist Association. After more than 30 years I was back in Africa. I wanted to find out what had changed since 1973 when I visited the Mbozi Mission Hospital in Tanzania.

Now 2021, Covid-19 has turned the whole world upside down. Fortunately, Zambia and other parts of Africa seem to be less affected than expected.

That was different in 2001. The HIV epidemic was at its peak and.

During my stay in Mpongwe I observed:

- Young men and women dying of AIDS every day.
- Every day there were funerals somewhere.
- Children did not go to school because they had to care for younger brothers and sisters or because they had to work in the fields.
- Moreover, there were far too few teachers to be able to provide good education.
- I was told that there was an unemployment rate above 80%.
- Teenagers were hanging around in the market, bored, because there was neither work nor further education.
- For the same reason, many teenage girls got pregnant or were already carrying a child on their backs.
- Grandparents were taking care of their grandchildren because their own son or daughter had died of AIDS.
- Girls and young women had to lead their families.
- There were a lot of orphans in the district (5000 in 2001!).

Children in Mpongwe actually had no future at all.

Based on all these experiences and observations, and after a lot of discussions with the former Aids coordinator Harrison Musunda from Mpongwe Mission Hospital, I decided in 2001 to set up a foundation with the main goal of supporting orphans and vulnerable children.

Inspired by the following saying in Bemba from a teacher of the Mpongwe Basic school:

“Peleni abana kukula aba ku Mpongwe ubwikalo ubusuma ubwa kutanshi”,

The name of the foundation became: Give the children of Mpongwe a future. Abbreviated to GCMF or in Dutch GKMT.

The foundation GCMF was born and we started fundraising in the Netherlands for supporting OVC's. The organization became registered in 2005 as an NGO under the NGO-act with a Zambian board of 10 people from different sectors with mr. Kalima as chair.

In the past 20 years the foundation has aimed through its activities to contribute towards poverty reduction, sustainable development and the creation of job opportunities in the Mpongwe district.

The focus has always been on four main areas:

1. *Education,*
2. *Healthcare,*
3. *Knowledge exchange,*
4. *Labour and income,*

All-in all, to serve and support the community of Mpongwe.

The organization has, besides the support of OVC's in the whole district during 20 years, achieved a lot of successes in constructing community schools, teacher houses and Pit latrines in schools. We electrified Mpongwe Basic School.

We donated a hammer mill to the Switti Women Group. The hammer mill is still working after 12 years. I saw it some days ago with my own eyes. That hammermill was our first income generating project.

In the context of other income generating projects, GCMF built a community hall for Nchembwe Women Association and constructed a vocational training center and a poultry for Ibenga Area Gender Association.

The foundation renovated the TB and Nutrition ward at Mpongwe Mission Hospital and in 2006 we started the popular GCMF Guesthouse, restaurant and internetcafé.

In the context of knowledge exchange, in 2007 and 2009 we established a youth exchange program. Youth from Mpongwe went to the Netherlands and

youth from the Netherlands came to Mpongwe to look into aspects of the Zambian and Dutch education and health systems, agriculture, livestock and sports.

The youth group from the Netherlands donated 5 water pumps and financed the repair of 13 boreholes in the district.

More than 125 students from different Universities for applied sciences in the Netherlands have completed internships in community schools, the hospital, the college and the guesthouse. Back in the Netherlands every student was convinced that they got “luggage for live”.

The above projects were funded by many individuals through the Dutch NGO GKMT (Geef de Kinderen van Mpongwe een Toekomst) and her Dutch partners like Wild Geese, Vastenactie and the Zambia group from Belgium.

All the projects have upon completion been handed over to the different local ministries or registered groups, representing the community of Mpongwe.

The mentioned projects have all their own unique history and vision. So has the college where we are now.

Over the years my late husband George and I observed that besides the scarcity of opportunities for young people in Mpongwe, there was also a shortage of skilled labourers in the district.

Our dream started as we asked ourselves:

Is it possible to construct a college?

- ✓ Where students from very poor families get high-quality professional education?
- ✓ That has its own boarding near a well-managed farm?
- ✓ That has sports fields, a library, a knowledge centre, and full internet and afterschool activities?

A college:

- ✓ That has all of the facilities, equipment, tools and supplies needed to teach students practical skills in different fields.
- ✓ Where students have meals with fresh products, grown at the school and their own farm.
- ✓ That teaches students the business skills they need to get good jobs or start their own enterprises.

- ✓ Where students receive an official certificate so they can go on for a diploma and degree.

A college

- ✓ Where girls get the same opportunities as boys.
- ✓ Where no student is excluded due to a lack of funds.
- ✓ And above all, a college where our students graduate with the knowledge and skills, they need to overcome poverty.

We were aware that our objectives were ambitious, but we took up the challenge and started the construction of this college in 2011 and GKMT promised to do his utmost best to make this possible!

Under supervision of Bram Sol, who is among us today, GKVTC has been built in accordance with various principles of sustainability, with regard not only to the building itself, but also to the teaching strategy, the energy consumption and the operating costs.

The design is embedded in the local culture and economy and has to contribute to the employment, the development and the transfer of knowledge in the district. The design makes full use of the location and the climate, and it is flexible and easily disassembled. The materials that are used for building are home-grown and at the end of the life-cycle of the buildings they melt back into nature again. Where possible the water supply is supposed to come from collected rainwater, and the water can be re-used.

Our dream was not only to build a college that offers its students a formal education, but also offers students practical entrepreneurial skills to start their own businesses.

We now have a college with boarding facilities, administration buildings, class rooms for theory and practice, a library, a computer area, a multifunctional insaka, kitchen and restaurant, a carpentry workshop, a home science building, a piggery, a poultry, a demo plot and garden, where our own farm-fresh products are grown.

Our first two-year course in Organic Farming started as early as 2014. Forty local farmers graduated at the VTC in 2016, and now boast an officially acknowledged certificate. Seventeen of our construction workers have passed a practical TEVETA exam in carpentry and bricklaying. The cost of which was

borne by the Foundation. Since 2014, more than 150 Young people followed a course in organic farming, carpentry, bricklaying and tailoring.

I already said that our objectives were ambitious.

Setting up a college like this is not easy. It cost blood, sweat and tears. The responsibility is high and donors are asking for accountability. The challenges were enormous, but in difficult times my motto was always:

Stick to the message: and the message was creating better prospects for the children and young people in the Mpongwe district.

The year 2019 was a decisive year since the fundamental facilities were completed to boost the enrolment of new students. Together with this moment, the development towards a professional organisation was hindered because of several reasons which made us decide that we needed to cooperate with a proven educational institute in Zambia to make our dream come true. Our first meetings with the management of ZCA Monze immediately gave us the belief we found our dreamed partner.

With the transfer of all the existing facilities like, buildings, land, essential infrastructure, educational courses, we challenge ZCA Monze to cherish and develop this Mpongwe campus to great heights.

And I am convinced that under the responsibility and high educational standards of ZCA MONZE, the college will flourish and will produce students who are prepared to strengthen the economy, the education and the welfare of Zambia.

In this way we ensure, with the many good people of Mpongwe, that our common efforts of the last 20 years, become sustainable for current and future generations.

By handing over the College to the Ministry of Agriculture with ZCA Monze as education provider, GKMT has now actually realized the objectives of the foundation. This means that we, as GKMT, have to discuss and decide how our relationship with our former projects can be shaped in the future.

Finally

My first experiences in Mpongwe many, many years ago, were heart-warming and connected me for ever to this community. It was the start of a long journey

with a beautiful dream as a roadmap. Here we stand today and we can safely say that our dream came true: together with all who joined me on my journey to establish this college I can say: many many thanks. Natotela sana. To all who continue this marvellous journey I can say: all the best and go for it! The motto for ZCA Monze and all the students is: ...Shoot for the moon, even if you miss, you will land among the stars!.....

I wish the Ministry of Agriculture, ZCA Monze, the students and the community of Mpongwe all the best for the future.

Thank you for listening.

Enjoy your day.

God bless you