

“Time for girls to shine” - The traditional leader’s voice



Mutape Mhlanga at the Beacon High School. Foto: Plan International.

Mr. David Mhlanga (37) is a Village Head in Muradzikwa Village in Chipinge District. His village is close to Beacon High School. A Village Head in the area is named “Mutape” in the local language. So Mr. David Mhlanga can be referred to as Mutape Mhlanga. He inherited his position from his father five years ago when he was 32 years old. He is a father of four children, two boys and two girls. Subsistence farming is his major source of income. His family didn’t put much value on education and because of that he did not proceed to lower secondary school and instead preferred to look after his father’s cattle till he got married with 19 years.

“It has been a tradition in my family that education is a waste of time as no one has gone beyond primary school in my family”, he said with a chuckle. “However, I see things differently now. Since becoming a Mutape I have travelled a lot and attended a lot of meetings and that has helped me to appreciate education. I want all my children to complete at least the basic education.”

Mutape Mhlanga was very committed in mobilizing his community to support the construction of the boarding facility at Beacon Hill. But it was not an easy task, considering the construction of the boarding facility was going to target girls in a male dominated society. He was one of the traditional leaders who was part of the inception meeting of the project in his area. At the inception meeting, all participants hailed the project and described how it was going to assist all the disadvantaged girls in Chipinge District. The District Administrator had said failure or success of the project depended heavily on the Village Heads and their communities and this was not an opportunity to be lost. Mutape Mhlanga committed himself to make sure the project was a success in Muradzikwa Village where Beacon Hill High School is situated.

“When I was invited to the inception meeting of the boarding house project I was not sure what it was all about. But after the meeting I knew that this was a very good idea. So I came back and conducted meetings with other local leaders and people in the villages. We all agreed that we needed to support the construction of this boarding facility in our area to support girls’ education.

It is very true that there were many girls dropping out of school because of walking long distances to school.”

So Mutape Mhlanga became Chairperson of the subcommittee that was responsible for mobilizing locally available resources to support the construction of the boarding facility at Beacon High school. Mutape Mhlanga became the link between the school and his community. For anything that the school needed the support of the community, the school would contact David Mhlanga for action. Mutape Mhlanga wanted to support the boarding house construction, because many generations would benefit from it, so it is a life time investment in the community. He really appreciates what this project has done in his community and the entire district of Chipinge, especially for girls. His wish though, is to see the construction of more boarding houses at many other secondary schools in Chipinge District.

“I have seen many girls doing much better than boys in school, and sometimes society don’t give them the same opportunities than boys. By not giving girls equal opportunities, society pushes girls into child marriages and all other forms of abuses that girls go through. This is what I realized and I said to myself, society needs to change and change had to start with me. With this boarding facility at our school, it is time for girls to shine”, said Mutape Mhlanga.