

**A PROPOSAL FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE MOHOCHI
EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION (MEF)**

BY

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Introduction and Background Information

Education has a very big role to play in efforts at poverty alleviation in developing nations. Unfortunately, the potential of the former to play that crucial role is greatly undermined by the latter. As a consequence, a very small percentage of the population in developing nations acquire sufficient amounts of quality and relevant education that would prepare them to effectively contribute in bringing the desired development to their societies. Kenya is one such nation. At independence in 1963, illiteracy, together with poverty and disease were identified as the three greatest enemies, hence the focus of Kenya's development goals. To date, despite spending slightly over 33% of the national budget on education, the sector still reels from enormous challenges.

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing Kenya is one of access to education. In 1999, a national census counted Kenya's population at 28.7 million. Based on the same census, the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) projected that the population would have grown to 32.2 million by 2003. Without a matched growth in the education sector, the situation is bound to deteriorate further. While the introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE) in 2003 did have a tremendous impact, especially in terms of enrollments, those gains have not been fully consolidated. In fact, due to poverty, many children have ended up dropping out of school. There was very little preparation in terms of infrastructure, availability of teachers, and other relevant equipment before the introduction of FPE. As such, increased enrolments led to crowding in small classrooms and made an already poor student teacher ratio worse.

More worrying, though, is the fear of what will happen once the beneficiaries of FPE move on to secondary and tertiary education. As it is now, access to education is not limited to the lower levels. For the last couple of years, between 50 and 60 thousand high school graduates have been attaining the minimum university entry grade. Unfortunately, public universities have the capacity to absorb a maximum of 10 to 12 thousands. With a very poor middle level college sector in Kenya, the rest of the qualifiers, together with the many who failed to meet the cut off grade (usually more than half a million take the high school examinations; 671,550 in 2005 and 666,451 in 2006) are locked out of meaningful schooling. The few with financial means find their way into private universities in Kenya or enroll for privately sponsored programs in the public universities. A very small number manages to go for higher education in other countries. In sum, the issue of access is far from being solved. Yet access is not the only problem.

As alluded to above, there is a shortage of teachers. According to the Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNTC), FPE has led to a shortfall of 60,000 teachers. The government, though contesting the figures, accepts that there is a shortage but clearly states that it has no funds to employ more. While this ensures, many graduates ready and available to take up the task roam the streets unemployed. Other major problems include; low completion rates, lack of facilities or poor and dilapidated ones (where any exist), lack of adequate teaching materials, and a crumbling inspection and monitoring mechanism.

The Name

The Mohochi Educational Foundation is being set up in memory of my father (Laurent Mohochi) who passed away in 1981. While serving in Burma, during the Second World War, he underwent a lot of tribulations due to his illiteracy. Upon his return, he vowed that his children would not go through the same experience so long as he had two hands, and was able to work. Experience in his travels had also shown him that mission stations invariably set up learning institutions. He therefore bought a piece of land near a catholic mission station in Isibania. Struggling as a poor peasant farmer, he managed to lay a foundation that ensured all my 8 siblings, except the first born, got a high school education. He fought many battles with the general public and administrators alike whenever he felt that the operations of the school nearby were being interfered with. In a community that has very little regard for the girl-child, he was often ridiculed for wasting his time and hard earned money to educate girls. He is remembered today for his two passions: religion and education. Being his only child with a university education, I feel the best way to honor his commitment to education is to start an educational foundation aimed at improving educational standards in Kuria.

Why Kuria District

Kuria district, located in south western Kenya along the Kenya Tanzania border, is home to the Kuria community. The Kuria are a small community (estimated to be 215,000) that is highly marginalized. From their initial agro-pastoral background, the Kuria are currently engaged only in small scale subsistence farming. In the year 2006 a national poverty survey placed Kuria in the bottom three districts in terms of the poverty level. One area in which the Kuria have lagged behind, and

perhaps it is the biggest contributing factor to its' state of underdevelopment is education. There are very few schools in Kuria district, and the few that are available are poorly equipped and staffed. The number of students from Kuria who make it through the education ladder to university education is very small. As a matter of fact, I am only the 7th of 7 Kuria PhD holders. It has a notoriously low school completion rate, especially among the girl-child. It is still customary for Kuria families to withdraw their daughters from school in order to marry them off and raise money from bride price in order to pay for the boys' tuition. While the Kuria have many big problems, I am convinced that education is one that needs very urgent attention.

Objectives

The following are the main objectives of the proposed Mohochi Educational foundation:

1. To offer scholarships that would enable bright young boys and girls from poor families acquire an education, hence giving them an opportunity to partake of a basic human right, and uplift themselves as well as their families from abject poverty.
2. To start a model school that provides affordable and quality education that gives children in Kuria a fighting chance in the stiff competition for space in Kenya's institutions of higher education.
3. To offer the youth in Kuria district a good educational foundation, capable of preparing and giving them a competitive edge in the local and global job market.

About the proposal writer (Dr. Sangai Mohochi)

Sangai Mohochi holds a Bachelor of Arts (Sociology and Swahili), Master of Arts (Swahili), and PhD (Swahili language Attitudes) from Egerton University in Njoro Kenya. He taught at Egerton University for 9 years before moving to St. Lawrence University in New York. After two years he moved to Stanford University in California where he currently teaches Swahili. Dr. Mohochi is among the very few who have managed to weave their way through the harsh realities of Kuria district with regard to education. He was born and brought up in Kuria where he attended his primary and secondary education. He fully understands the local conditions, especially the main impediments to educational attainment, which include several cultural practice of the Kuria. He firmly believes that he owes a lot to the community and sees contributing in improving

its' education standards as a step in fulfilling that desire. He sees this as a life long commitment to serve his people (His CV is attached).