

Phyllis Kachere

“I was a girl. I came from a poor and polygamous family. And I belong to the Johanne Marange apostolic sect.”

Ordinarily, these three circumstances would have sealed the fate of high-flying 24-year-old Miss Bridget Moyo and automatically rendered her a present and future beggar.

Being a girl did not spare her the challenges peculiar to girls and women.

“My education was considered optional; it was the first thing to be sacrificed in times of crises. My brothers, uncles and male cousins’ needs had to come first for the family in a community that believed the future of the family lay in these people’s hands.

“It was automatic that the family’s resources had primarily to be spent on them,” Miss Moyo, whose father had six wives and 23 children, told hundreds of Guruve villagers, secondary school children, senior Government officials gathered for the launch of the US\$19 million secondary education bursary fund for girls at Chifamba Secondary School.

The UK government’s Department for International Development (DFID) released the funds that would be channelled through the Campaign for Female Education (Camfed) and are expected to enable 24 000 girls from poor families attend secondary school.

Born and raised in Wedza district, Miss Moyo, a beneficiary of the Camfed secondary school bursary for girls, recently graduated with a Bachelor of Science Honours degree in Business Management and Entrepreneurship from the Women’s University in Africa.

Miss Moyo told The Sunday Mail in an interview that the family disintegrated following the death of her father when she was in Grade 4 while her mother relocated to her village in Mutambara, Manicaland.

After completing Grade 7, she could not proceed to high school and was offered employment as a domestic worker.

“For a whole year, I toiled as a domestic worker, but that did not stop my dream of getting an education. Growing up in the Johanne Marange church came with its benefits and challenges,” she recalled.

“The expectation on me by most was that, like most girls from my church, I should marry early. I was only supposed to dream about the kind of husband I was going to marry and nothing else.

“Even when the odds were against me and meant I had to break for a year from school, I did not lose focus.”

Miss Moyo said marriage proposals kept on coming thick and fast, but she repulsed them all and, today, she has earned the respect of her church’s elders as she has become an ambassador, dismissing the common myth that Johanne Marange women are uneducated.

Her life changed completely when the school head of a local school where she was staying with an aunt got her connected to Camfed.

“It was a joy to once again enrol in school and I promised myself I would see my dream come true. I would carry the only pair of shoes in my bag and walk barefooted to school, just to make sure they would last longer,” she said.

Also giving testimony to how the bursary had dramatically changed her poverty-stricken circumstances was soon-to-be-certified medical doctor 24-year-old Miss Talent Tokodai from Chivhu.

“I grew up as an orphan. My poor widowed and uneducated mother took care of all the family needs.

“I struggled through primary school and it was a nightmare to acquire a school uniform let alone school shoes,” Miss Tokodai said.

Having passed Grade 7 with five units, secondary education became a dim light at the end of the tunnel that could go out any time as her poor mother failed to raise the fees to register the Mashayamombe village girl in Chivhu into Form 1.

It was a godsend for Miss Tokodai and her mother that her primary school head managed to enrol her for the bursary and got a placement for Form 1 at Daramombe High School in Chivhu.

She and her mother prayed incessantly when news of the bursary reached them.

“It is with so much pride and a sense of achievement that I share with you that from all this poverty, I am in my final year at the University of Zimbabwe. I am studying towards a Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery. This time next year I will be a qualified medical doctor,” said Miss Tokodai to wild applause from the gathering.

She said determination to succeed and make herself proud was the driving force, she just could not allow those tears and the prayers to go to waste.

“I resolved in my heart that I would change my family’s poverty-stricken circumstances and I would constantly remind myself what a shame it would be for me to waste this opportunity. I had gotten the opportunity to go to school at the last minute and I could not waste such a chance,” said Miss Tokodai, who like her colleague

Bridget, is the first in the whole extended family to enrol for university education. Since its launch in Zimbabwe in 1993, Camfed has given more than 888 000 children access to a safer learning environment. Girls supported through Camfed bursaries have gone on to become lawyers, teachers, doctors and engineers.