News
Ministry



Young people walk by the Auxilium Skills Training Center in Makeni, Lusaka, Zambia. Along with the Home for Girls at Risk and the Open Community School, the center is part of City of Hope, run by the Salesian Sisters of St. John Bosco. (GSR photo/Derrick Silimina)



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As Rejoice Banda walks back home into Chibolya — the most feared slum in Zambia — young boys share a joint of marijuana through a bumpy track giving way to lined-up shacks, while the smell drifts through the township.

Nestled 4.5 kilometers southwest of Lusaka, Zambia's capital, the notorious township is renowned as a hub for drug trafficking, alcohol abuse and burglary, among other illicit activities, where even the police and other law enforcers do not dare to tread.

For Banda, 28, her binge drinking and all-day craving for cannabis was a daily battle. She started smoking in eighth grade, and by the time she was 18 years old, she smoked every day. Over time, her addictions crept into every corner of her life, nearly leading to her dropping out of school.

But after social welfare programs led her to the Salesian Sisters of St. John Bosco's Home for Girls at Risk, part of what is known as "City of Hope," Banda now considers herself a transformed person, having survived bouts of alcohol and drug abuse, thanks to the sisters' program.

In a bid to promote the orphans and vulnerable children through education and skills training, City of Hope (founded in 1987) consists of the Home for Girls at Risk, the Auxilium Skills Training Center, and the Open Community School. Established in May 2005, the first community school moved to the new site and was meant for children over the age of 9 who had not been going to school but were old enough to attend government schools.



Hotel management students at the Auxilium Skills Training Center in Makeni, Lusaka, Zambia, present their snacks after a practical class session. (GSR photo/Derrick Silimina)

"I am blessed to be among the youths awarded a bursary through the Constituency Development Fund, [a scholarship] to enable me acquire a skill at this training center," Banda told GSR. "My focus on studies has really kept me away from engaging in illicit activities."

She is upbeat about pursuing studies in hotel management at the sisters' Auxilium Skills Training Center, located 10 kilometers south of Lusaka city in the suburb of Makeni. While the sisters' residency is for at-risk girls, the center caters to a broader population and is renowned for rebuilding young people's lives through training in skills such as general hospitality, information and communication technologies, hotel management, tailoring, and general agriculture, among others.

The religious sisters at the training center also counsel young people about the dangers of engaging in illicit sexual activities and gender-based violence.

"We educate youths, especially the vulnerable in society, to become better citizens," Sr. Margaret Mutale, principal of the Auxilium Skills Training Center, told GSR. "Apart from skills development, we also provide them with lifelong moral guidance to ease their stable lifestyle. Our aim is to usher young people into the job market or become self-employed."



Salesian Sr. Margaret Mutale, left, poses for a photo with students of the Auxilium Skills Training Center in Makeni, Lusaka, Zambia. (GSR photo/Derrick Silimina)

Like Banda, more than 150 other at-risk girls have been introduced to stay at the City of Hope by stakeholders who are in charge of taking care of the needy in society. The home aims for the girls to feel secure and loved, to grow in self-esteem, and to rejoin society.

"The sisters' mentorship has transformed me," Banda said. "I can't wait to establish my own restaurant once I graduate. Thanks to school management and tutors for reshaping my life."

One of the leading providers of technical, vocational and entrepreneurship training to young women and men in Lusaka, the Auxilium Skills Training Center is rated among the best in the country by Zambia's Technical Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training Authority. The center collaborates with the government, along with community and development organizations, to address problems of poverty, lack of skills training, and high unemployment in the Southern African country of about 20 million people.

Based on their charism — "to promote education for underprivileged young people and women by uplifting their standards of living" — the Salesian Sisters of St. John Bosco have over the years built strong ties with the local community.



Hotel management students display the snacks they prepared during practical lessons at the Auxilium Skills Training Center in Makeni, Lusaka, Zambia. (GSR photo/Derrick Silimina)

With the motto "sure successful future through skills," the skills training center aims to move the youth out of poverty and help them provide for their families, who live

in the most severe poverty-stricken areas of Lusaka and beyond.

For this reason, more than 150 vulnerable youths have been enrolled for the 2024 academic year to pursue various skills at the center, thanks to the Salesian sisters' commitment to realign young people's future aspirations.

While there has been some progress toward job creation in Zambia in recent years, unemployment remains deeply rooted within the social structures of most communities. Childhood marriage, lack of access to education, and barriers to economic emancipation are some of the daily realities for many youths in the Southern African country.

Mutale is optimistic about the effectiveness of giving youths the option to be self-sustaining and to contribute to an important aspect of a healthy city, instead of engaging in illicit activities that may endanger their lives.

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Since its establishment in 1995, the Auxilium Skills Training Center has continued to yield hundreds of graduates per year who, upon graduation, mostly rely on the training to get employed in restaurants, hotels and lodges, while others become self-employed.

The center is also renowned for providing education and women development interventions (such as counseling and business cooperatives) for vulnerable people, not only in Lusaka but in other districts, including Luwingu, Kasama, Mansa and Mazabuka.

Mutale expressed joy that the positive response from her learners is overwhelming despite the financial challenges to pay for their tertiary training, as the school depends on their tuition fees to operate.

She bubbled with conviction and shared how her missionary work started from humble beginnings in Kasama district in the northern province of Zambia where she grew up.

"I was inspired by the Salesian sisters' passion to uplift young people's lives, and since I share the same desire to help young people thrive, I ended up joining them so that I can equally contribute effectively to the sisters' charism," said Mutale, who

has been at the helm of the institution as the school's principal since late 2023.



Salesian Sr. Margaret Mutale in her office at the Auxilium Skills Training Center in Makeni, Lusaka, Zambia (GSR photo/Derrick Silimina)

"Each time I see young people succeed in whatever skill of their choice, I feel happy because what drives me is the desire to serve souls," she continued. "It's humbling to see many youths look forward to becoming self-reliant upon graduation in readiness to take care of themselves and family members."

Bupe Kalumba, one of the students pursuing general hospitality at the center, said getting trained for the fashion and hospitality industries in the country is exciting.

Kalumba, 25, said sisters are leading the way on journeys previously unimaginable, as serving souls is not only preparing someone to go to heaven, but also to prepare someone now to contribute to their own livelihood, she said.

Meanwhile, Ruth Mukuma, 24, one of the students at the training school, said her dream to one day become a fashion designer is slowly unfolding as she takes a tailoring course at the skills training center.

"I can't wait to finish my course because my passion has always been to become a fashion designer," she said. "Thank you to this institution for adding value to what I want to become, as I can't wait to live my dream and lift myself out of poverty."