

INDIVIDUAL INITIATIVE, ZAMBIA

U-RETAIN

Plastic waste remains one of the mainland pollutants in Lusaka, and Zambia as a whole. The use and dumping of plastic materials in the streets of most communities is extreme. However, in a society full of plastic waste materials and developing recycling companies, it's paramount to find a means of linking the less privileged and recycling companies. The You Retain, spelled as U-Retain is an environmental initiative that seeks to use plastics as purchasing power for educational basics such as books, pencils, pens, school uniforms, school bags, school shoes and help adolescents in examinations classes pay their examination fee. Furthermore, the initiative also allows children living on the streets and the less privileged to buy light food-stuffs and sanitary pads using plastics.

The aim of the initiative is to add more value to plastic waste materials so that people can exchange them for basic needs. The collected plastics are sold to recycling companies at a reasonable monetary amount. The initiative will engage more with community schools and government schools and will put up U-Retain Booths in places that have

a lot of plastic waste materials. At its early stage and later stage, the initiative should be able to make money vis-a-vis the sale of collected plastic waste materials and be able to benefit the engaged audience through providing educational and school materials. Besides that, it will also be able to help a good number of homeless children access sanitary pads and light meals.

GOLD AWARD WINNER

John Emmanuel Kachakwale, Beatrice Phiri,
Photograph: Fredrick Chilongo and DMS production,
Individual Initiative, Zambia





Coffee Talk with John Emmanuel

Please tell us a little about yourself, John! My name is John Emmanuel Kachakwale. I am 23 years old and pursuing my bachelor's degree in Arts of Mass Communication and Public Relations at Cavendish University in Zambia. Besides that, I am an activist and advocate for the environment related to social health and youth advocacy.

How did your journey as an environmentalist start? I never saw myself getting involved with activism and advocacy when I was younger. It all started in 2013 when my high-school Geography teacher selected me to be trained to be a Child Climate Ambassador at the Zambia Children Climate Conference. The training included various environmental and climate change sessions and for me, it was socially interesting because we were a group of 75 children from different parts of Lusaka. Weirdly, the training itself did not ignite a spark to start something but after the training, I had memories of my time back in Kabwe, one of the most polluted cities because it's based around the mining industry. The water and land are contaminated with toxic lead. I currently live in Lusaka where many people don't have clean water and travel long distances to get water. Sometimes we would wake up around 4 o'clock in the morning to go and queue for water. It was problematic for maintaining hygiene and it still is; cholera and other infectious diseases are a big problem. Poor waste management is another big problem in Lusaka and plastic and other waste covers the streets. So, a group of us started to work on informing and educating our fellow young people in schools and churches on climate change and linking it to the water crisis, hygiene, droughts, and many other issues. Soon we realized that the root cause of contamination of the

soil and water was waste, so my colleague and I decided to research waste management. And this is our focus today.

What is your activity now? We have built up a system to collect waste in cities, sell it to recycling companies, and from the money we make, we buy school material and sanitary equipment. We give students lessons in environmentalism and are working very closely with recycling companies – we are setting up proper contracts with them and we audit the quality.

What challenges do you face? There is a lot of bureaucratic obstacles here. For example, we have to get licenses from local authorities which can take months to obtain. There are lots of things we'd like to do, but we are restricted. Sometimes people do business by preferring the 'back door' route where they end up bribing people in offices. This is not the route we take.

What are your dreams? We are running our U-Retain initiative as a non-profit organization now and the word has spread all over the country. We are making an impact and for us, this is a dream come true. We want to be a platform for young people. We want to empower them and let them embrace sustainability.

What is your message to fight plastic pollution in general? Ban single-use-plastic! We have to cut back on the waste we are producing every day. Ultimately it is about education for young people. Because the future belongs to them, and they need to be informed.

