



# Philanthropists transform children's future as they go the extra mile

By GEORGE KEBASO

**E**ven on a phone conversation, one could easily "see" her smile as 12-year-old Diana Kemunto vividly, remembers the day 'Lady luck' knocked on the door of the family house, in Mukuru slums.

One morning, heading to New Light Academy in the neighbourhood, the Standard Six pupil at Bridges International Academies in Mukuru Kwa Reuben had a surprise awaiting her.

"I met with some people who said they were from Bridges International Academies, and wanted to see my parents," she said.

Little did it occur to her that the meeting with these strangers, and the walk back home, would be the start of a something big.

She learnt several things during the trek back to her parents' house via the slum alleys.

"They told me I can learn better and achieve quality education, I will join Bridges International Academies," said the girl who desires to be a doctor.

She was later accompanied by her parents to the new school and here, the pupil did not have any basics, including a pencil. The teachers she was introduced to volunteered to buy what she needed to propel her into what she terms, "a promising future".

At that moment she spoke to herself saying she would work hard enough to ensure future generation did not live in the slum.

"Slum life is not good at all.

There is a lot of suffering, education is inaccessible due to poverty, but this can be overcome by learning," she said.

And during a recent event where the World Bank Group announced a Sh850 million (US\$10 million) equity, to support expansion of Bridge International Academies, Kemunto, led a group of pupils in reciting a beautiful poem.

## For a cause

The poem illustrates how impoverished the current generation will be should they refuse to focus on quality education.

Her teacher, Amos Ochenge said that without concerted efforts by educators and mentorship support, children from informal settlements, found it difficult to achieve academic goals. "The education process in the slums is difficult because of the widespread poverty levels and conditions they live in. Besides poverty, there are insufficient teachers," he said.

"Due to the small ratio of teachers to learners, most pupils often drop out of school." It is a great celebration to have Bridge International Academies breathe new life to children in slums," he added.

The success story of Kemunto and other learners from informal settlements is almost similar to 13-year-old, John Nyamai, now proceeding to Maseno School in Kisumu County.

The stories of these children, albeit from different backgrounds is a reflection of the power of phi-

lanthropy, to raise the standards of education for families living in impoverished conditions.

While, Kemunto comes from an informal city set-up, Nyamai hails from rural Machakos.

However, the two of them are likely to achieve their academic goals, through generous support from well-wishers.

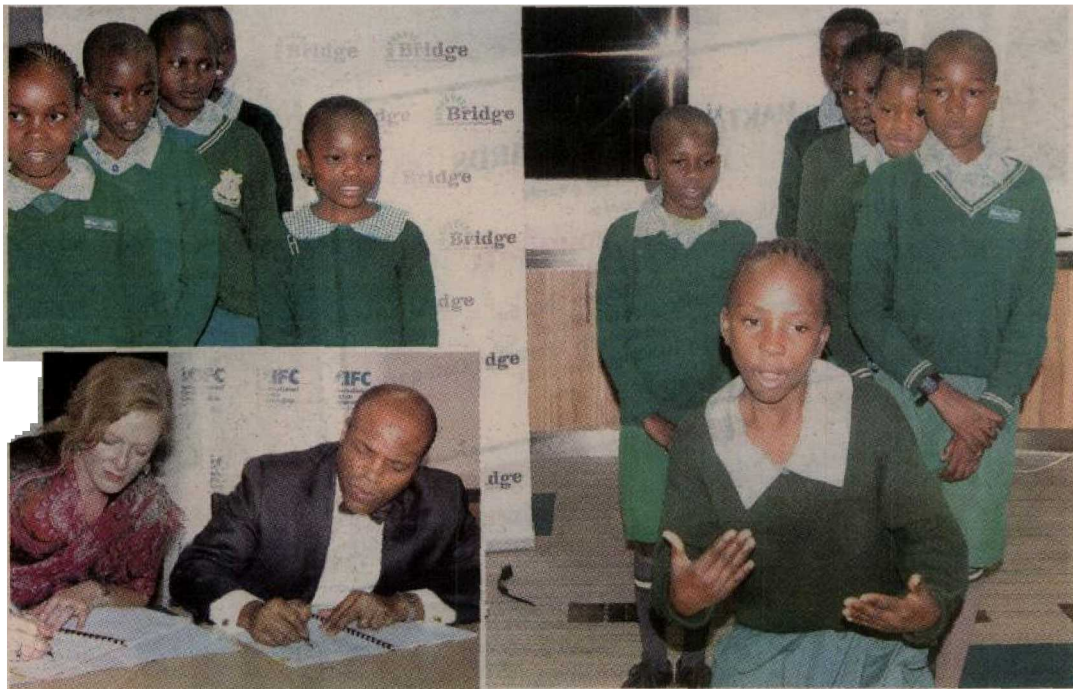
On January 23, the UK's development finance institution (CDC), set its height to invest Sh510 million (US\$6 million), alongside that of the World Bank, for the same cause.

Bridge International Academies, founded in 2008, now operates over 250 schools in Kenya teaching the national curriculum, serving pupils from families who live on less than Sh170 (US\$2) per day per person.

"We see ourselves as having the potential to transform education for children and families who hail from low-income families. Bridge is already a large employer in Kenya, particularly amongst 24 to 35-year-olds, who were previously unemployed," said Dolika Banda, CDC's Regional Director for Africa.

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**Diana Kemunto leads pupils in reciting a poem. INSET: Bridge International Academies' co-founder Shannon May and (RIGHT) IFC director for eastern and southern Africa, Jean Philippe Prosper, sign an agreement for funds to be released to the academy. PHOTO: BENARD OKWONGO**