

# STAR LIFE

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## KENYA'S USELESS COMMISSIONS OF INQUIRY

CENTRE PAGES

# BRINGING SCIENCE EDUCATION DOWN TO THE GRASSROOTS

BY RAVNEET SEHMI

**C**osmos Education is an international non-governmental youth organization working at the grassroots level. It is dedicated to improving science, technology, environmental education and sustainable development in Africa.

An American, Kevin Hunt, who was a PhD student at Stanford University and who until last year was the president of Cosmos Education Global, founded it.

Now he is the executive director Cosmos US, but works at the US-based National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). The Kenya branch of Cosmos has operated in Kenya since 2000. Hunt and a few of his colleagues were in Africa on a cross-continental expedition, travelling from the Cape to Cairo. Along the way they met the journalist/filmmaker Vivian Njogu, a Kenyan but based in Uganda, and what followed next was the formation of Cosmos Education Kenya (CEK).

The executive director of CEK, Isaac Musyoka, says, "We aim to inspire, empower, and engage young Kenyans in science education and to foster critical thinking that will serve as a life skill."

We were registered in 2006 as a charity organization. We target young Kenyans, primary, high school kids in particular. The volunteers are sharp university students, gradu-

ates and young professionals."

At present there are four regional branches: Cosmos Education Kenya, Cosmos Education UK and Cosmos Education Zambia. These groups all help in fund raising, donation collection, organization, publicity and finding volunteers.

Said Musyoka: "We seek to inspire youth in developing countries through hands-on learning activities and experiments."

"We have always tried to demystify science and let the kids know that there is nothing one cannot conquer if one strives towards it."

*We seek to inspire youth in developing countries through hands-on learning activities and experiments — Musyoka*

"Each year since 2000 we have sent a team of volunteers from around the globe on a journey stopping in schools, orphanages, youth and community centres and

villages. At each site we deliver inspiring and fun presentations on scientific and health issues.

"Our sessions in each school always begin with the introduction of the team members (to drive home the point that national boundaries are not restrictions on cooperation) followed by the introduction of our rules:

- If we speak too quickly for you to follow, tell us to slow down (with a special hand signal.)
- The key to all of science: You must ask questions!
- The key to learning: You must have fun.

"Getting their professional insights is another project we work on simultaneously. It is a mentorship programme where we get

professional Kenyans who are respected and recognized by society in different fields and we get them to share what their profession entails, how they got there, etc. The two schools we work closely with regarding this are the Kamukunji Secondary School and St Johns in Pumwani district.

"Our projects are focused on the slum schools in Kenya. A project born out of the Third World Youth Congress held in Glasgow, Scotland, in 2005, Africom is the name of the project. The project is meant to ship refurbished computers to schools in Kenya and Tanzania. The then executive director of Cosmos Education, Bridgit Muse, became the coordinator of the project."

In July this year, Cosmos Education Kenya partnered with Computers for Schools Kenya (CFSK), an organization dedicated to donating computers to schools all around the country, as well as maintaining them.

Says Musyoka: "Science is important because it encourages us to keep asking questions. The



**THE FUTURE:** Cosmos Volunteers with Kalukini Secondary School, Yatta, students. (Below) Isaac Musyoka.



heart of all science is the critical method of thinking: looking at cause and effect; creating a hypothesis; testing a theory; experimenting; and changing one's ideas and beliefs based on the results. From the results come more questions, and thus the cycle begins again.

"Our model is grassroots development from within; we want the youth in developing regions of the world to decide how their nations develop. In order to be able to do

this, the youth must have the knowledge and skills needed to understand the rapidly changing world around them.

By working directly in classrooms, making learning fun with hands-on experiments, and providing the students with talented role-models from their own geographic region, we hope to excite students about their potential drive development from within and to catalyze development that will have a positive effect on the biosphere.

"Our chief aim is to provide a positive experience in science for our audiences."

## INDONESIA'S "TREE MAN" RETURNS HOME

AN Indonesian man dubbed the "tree man" because of gnarled growths on his body has returned from hospital after six kilograms (13 pounds) of warts were surgically removed from his body, a doctor said on Tuesday.

Dede, who, like many Indonesians, goes by one name, first noticed the warts on his body after cutting his knee as a teenager.

Over time, he was sacked from his job, deserted by his wife and shunned by neighbours as the horn-like extensions covered most of his body.

One of Dede's doctors, Rachmad Dinata, said the hospital had allowed the 37-year-old to enjoy the Islamic fasting month with his family now that 95 per cent of the warts had been removed after nine op-

erations. The fasting month begins on September 1.

"He cannot be 100 per cent cured, but his life quality has improved. If once he depended on others to do his activities, now he can eat by himself, use his hand to write, use the cell phone," Dinata said.

The doctor said the warts on Dede's body, which an American doctor said were a result of severe Human

Papilloma Virus infection, might re-grow. But the disease is not life-threatening anymore.

Dede was operated on at the Hasan Sadikin provincial hospital in Bandung, West Java, nine months ago.

Dede must still go through more surgery to trim more warts from his palms and the back of his hands after the Muslim Eid al-Fitr holiday in October.