



**CONTRAST OF FORTUNES**—The refurbished St Augustine 1 (above) offers its learners like Hawa (inset above) a nice environment for learning. Joana (inset below) is not as lucky with the building shown in the picture below being the best at her school. (Pictures by Mac Neil Kalowekamo)



# Towards the future: Two girls and their schools

insecure because it had no land for cultivation. Their new home has plenty fertile land. The family has enough food but amenities like a health centre, water point, market and a better school are lacking.

For Joana, going to school is just a routine short of result-oriented. She wakes up every

Hawa beams with confidence to succeed. Her school is now putting on a new face thanks to a K280 million financial support from the Icelandic International Development Agency (Iceida).

St Augustine 1 is a complete primary school. It has 22 spacious modern blocks with 40 decent desks in each classroom. There is also an

Diocese.

There are 50 teachers at the school with a teacher to pupil ratio of 1 to 70. Unlike Joana who is attended to by one teacher once in a week if she is lucky, four teachers mentor Hawa everyday.

Role modelling is one of the key issues in the promotion of girls' education. Shortage of female

many women working in institutions like schools particularly in rural areas," reads the document.

For Hawa, that is not a problem. She has more than 30 female teachers to inspire her. There are none for Joana, another hurdle for her to progress. And the road continues to get bumpy.

In two or three years time, Hawa will be a mature girl in Form Two. While she would be advancing towards a cross line to tertiary level, Joana would be thinking of another school to continue her troubled journey.

Currently Mpita 2 has only classes from Standard one to four. A neighbouring full primary school that pupils at Mpita go to continue their education is Katuli. It is six kilometres away.

Last year alone, close to 50 children dropped out at Mpita 2 because they could not manage to continue their education at Katuli School.

Long distance aside, there are two big rivers to cross. During rainy season, they swell and become impassable. Villages separated by the rivers have a break in interaction. That means no school for children living on the wrong sides of the rivers.

Laisoni Menguwa, 47, reads for her daughter. He does not want Joana to be part of another statistic on the move out of school.

"Life nowadays is expensive. For one to succeed, education is the key," said the peasant farmer who relocated from Thyolo to Mangochi in 2007.

"I have failed in my attempt to provide the best for my child, because I did not go far with education," Menguwa said.

"The best thing I thought I could give Joana and all my children was education, but it is proving difficult," said the father of five.

The desperation registered on his face is real. A quick search for alternatives is the only thing he can do. But there is none that comes to mind.

"We will just leave everything in the hands of God and see how things go," said Menguwa. Her daughter expects the same.

When I talked to Joana for the last time, her face had the same concern expressed by her father. Hawa never did. A good school with all facilities was just a dream for her but now it is a reality.

"I am hungry to do well and I know I will make it," she said.