

Opportunity Through Education

**An Interview with Flaviana Matata,
 Founder, Flaviana Matata Foundation (FMF) and Founder and Chief Executive Officer, LAVY Beauty**

EDITORS' NOTE Flaviana Matata studied Electrical Engineering at Arusha Technical college in Tanzania. In 2007, she won the first edition of the Miss Universe Tanzania and went on to represent Tanzania in the Miss Universe pageant, where she finished in 6th place. She then moved to South Africa in 2009 to start her career in modeling and was scouted and moved to the U.S. in 2011 to pursue modeling. Alongside her modeling career, she pursued her passion to give back to the community by founding her nonprofit organization, Flaviana Matata Foundation, and her beauty company, LAVY, with one goal in mind, to create future leaders by teaching them how to empower themselves. She is determined to ensure LAVY products become available globally.



Flaviana Matata

and/or start their own businesses – ultimately helping them to fulfill their dreams. Flaviana Matata created FMF as her way of giving back to her community. FMF has grown from initially providing scholarships to pay for school fees, to supporting the multiple needs of girls so that they can feel safe throughout their entire education and have the skills and support they need to get a job or start a business. Since 2012, FMF has reached over 5,000 students in Tanzania. This has included providing students with needed school supplies as well

as renovating and refurbishing school infrastructure. Other accomplishments include distributing toiletry boxes to girls to use during their menstrual cycle and purchasing desks and chairs for all students. FMF has also been able to provide girls with full scholarships to stay in school. The next phase of FMF will be to ensure that these same young women have the support they need to go to university or vocational school.

LAVY Beauty was initiated with a vision of establishing a trustworthy beauty brand in the market whilst making a long-lasting social impact. Initially offering nail polish, to fill a gap in

the market as there was no locally owned nail care brand and the industry was dominated by male nail technicians, the LAVY Beauty brand was created.

INSTITUTION BRIEFS The Flaviana Matata Foundation (flavianamatatafoundation.org) is a 501(c)(3) that works to ensure girls and young women have the resources and opportunities they need to complete their education, find employment,



FMF provides much needed clean water to students in Tanzania



Flaviana Matata with some of the students supported by FMF

How did you become involved with Miss Universe Tanzania and how did this experience impact your life?

After graduating from college, a good friend of mine urged me to try out for Miss Universe Tanzania. I had no expectations and was participating for fun. I didn't even think I would make the top 10, let alone win. I only had two weeks to prepare for the worldwide competition where I made the finals and placed sixth overall. When I flew back home, I thought about my friend who saw the potential in me and made the decision to pursue modeling as a career and from there, the rest has been history in the making. It was an epiphany for me and truly the experience that changed the trajectory of my life.

What was your vision for creating the Flaviana Matata Foundation and how do you define its mission?



Flaviana Matata helps distribute backpacks full of supplies for young students

As the winner of the title of Miss Universe Tanzania, I served for a year as a goodwill ambassador, role model and charitable fundraiser. For me, it wasn't enough to simply use the platform and provide support while holding the title. When I signed my modeling contract and moved to the U.S., I decided to use my platform as a bridge to continue to give back.

Although I had no real idea exactly what I would do or how to bring my vision to fruition, I knew I had to do something. I used that realization to create the Flaviana Matata Foundation (FMF), a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization empowering girls through access to quality education. At the heart of our work at FMF is providing opportunity through education. There are millions of girls across the globe who are denied access to education. I began in my birthplace of Tanzania with one simple goal: transform generations to come by educating girls and creating a world where girls can stay in school and grow up to become leaders who are confident, economically independent, and supportive of their communities.

Will you provide an overview of FMF's work?

My father raised us to believe that, if you see a problem and if you are in a position to do so, solve it. Our approach focuses on girls and young women, although our impact reverberates through the community. With transformative projects like the Classroom Renovation Project which built and renovated seven classrooms, two offices and a library; and the Teachers' Housing construction project set to host at least ten families, we broaden our vision to serve. We believe girls can only have better economic, social and health outcomes if they stay in school. Our work provides the opportunity and resources to do so.

FMF has expanded from providing scholarships for young girls to complete their education to benefitting over 794 students and the surrounding community with a 32,000-liter safe water facility. In addition, we provide sanitary napkins to over 2,000 girls monthly and have impacted over 8,000 girls through various initiatives including menstrual hygiene management trainings.

To continue to increase our effectiveness, we have secured community and government partners. Through a myriad of programming, including our "Back to School" project, we've been able to impact over 8,500 girls and boys,



A student showing school supplies provided by FMF

and counting. Working collaboratively with our community partners, Msisune Primary School, located in Bayamoyo, increased enrollment by 85 percent since 2015 and significantly decreased the school dropout rate.

We currently have 25 students being sponsored through educational support under our scholarship program, 2093 girls receive free sanitary pads every month and 29 women are currently being trained under my beauty and personal care brand, LAVY.

How important is it to have metrics to measure the impact of FMF's work and how do you define success for the Foundation?

Helping just one has the power to change and transform an entire generation. Success for us is changing the trajectory of even just one life. Having said that, metrics are an imperative for FMF. We must measure progress as well as our effectiveness and budgets. We have limited resources and continue to tackle more and more. I have been and continue to be one of the largest donors and I will always hold the foundation accountable for every dollar spent. As we continue to grow and bring on sponsors, investors, and endowments, they need to clearly see how their support is impacting the next generation. To do so, we provide annual reports that assess our contributions and impact while continuing to refine the metrics for success.

What interested you in creating your own beauty and personal care line, LAVY, and what is your vision for the brand?

I founded LAVY, a beauty and personal care brand, in 2016. I had a vision of establishing a trustworthy beauty brand while making long-lasting social impact. I'm a beauty enthusiast, and I have a deep love for self-care. I saw a need for safe, quality, and affordable beauty products. I also realized the market was heavily



Flaviana Matata at the launch of FMF's Donate A Period Campaign

dominated by men and wanted to create an opportunity for women to gain a skill and run their own businesses.

I partnered with my sister, Jema, and together we set out on a mission to level the playing field by introducing a trustworthy beauty brand. We look to make a long-lasting social impact through training girls and women to be nail technicians while bringing high-quality, locally owned and affordable products to the market. We run a vocational training program that seeks to train more women in the nail care industry and we provide them with employment opportunities.

Do you see brand extensions for LAVY and what is your outlook for growth for the brand?

To date, the LAVY brand has garnered significant milestones and is now looking to continue to explore and expand into other beauty and personal care products. In July 2020, we expanded the LAVY product line and introduced sanitary pads. We understood the magnitude of the prevalent stigmas around menstruation and the gap in supply of clean and safe pads, especially for school girls, and decided to do something about it. We believe that there is a solution for every problem just waiting to be implemented, and we used our brand to help provide a solution for this issue. We designed pads that are fragrance and chlorine free with fast absorption properties. Since everything we do has a social impact component, 10 percent of the profit from the sale of sanitary pads helps to fund the distribution of free sanitary pads to schoolgirls.

You are deeply engaged and committed to Tanzania's future. What do you feel the world needs to know about Tanzania and how important is it for the country to tell its story?

It's my first love. I'm so excited and proud of what we have accomplished, but we still have much to do. We now have our first ever female president who is investing in infrastructure, natural resources and committed to bringing the country back, while continuing to strengthen international relations. There are also so many natural resources, including natural gas, gold, Tanzanite and potentially

so much more. With the world moving towards the energy transition and with the growing calls to take climate change seriously, Tanzania is also in a prime position to embrace renewable energy like solar and wind power as well as having much to offer in agriculture. Investors have a vast arena in which they can look to grow and diversify their investments and we welcome them to come and take a look for themselves.

You have been a role model to many girls in Tanzania and have made a great impact with the work of your Foundation. Do you take moments to reflect and appreciate what you have accomplished or are you always looking to the future?

I consider it a blessing when I look at what we have accomplished. I'm filled with an immense sense of gratitude. I often think back to winning the title of Miss Universe Tanzania and serving my first year. For me, it wasn't enough. I have and will continue to use my platform as a bridge to give back. To whom much is given, much is required, and much is expected.

We have leveraged the gift of education, access and opportunity to create more for those who do not have the same. I am deepening my impact now, and I am showing how to start where they are and using what they have to make powerful change. I have personally financed FMF and a portion of everything we do under LAVY goes back to the community through the Foundation. We do well by doing good and each time I reflect on that, my soul smiles. So, yes, I look to the future, but I also enjoy the goodness and the impact of now. ●



A selection of LAVY Beauty products