

Book Fair exposes young authors to the world

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A YOUNG Zimbabwean in love with a spanner and a pen . . . a Mozambican schoolteacher whose pupils have taught him such a big lesson that he now respects them . . .

These are the worlds of Daniel Motsi, the 25-year-old Zimoco diesel mech apprentice whose new book, *The Beast of Fame*, was exposed to the world during the Zimbabwe International Book Fair which ended in Harare on Saturday. The other is Lukas Mkuti, who translated and edited the other children's book, *Breakfast of Sjamboks*, which is a collection of poems by pupils of Josina Machel Secondary School in Maputo.

Mkuti and Motsi spoke to this compiler about their books, during the fair where both titles were exhibited.

The Beast of Fame is not only about cattle which the author used to herd back home as a younger man; it is a commentary on the ill-treatment that these animals suffer at the hands of children who are blissfully ignorant of the economic role the cattle and other animals play in our human life: ploughing our fields and carrying our goods among other things.

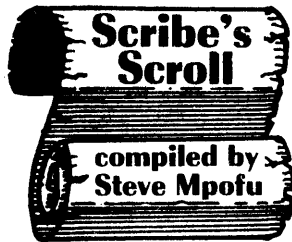
Motsi's simple, fine narrative, his sharp eye for detail and humour certainly mark him out as a potentially great future artist. Already one of two manuscripts he submitted to his publishers reportedly "has hope".

He said he sent the manuscript for his first book, written while he was in Form 1 at Chihota Secondary School, to get "guidelines for writing,

but was surprised to learn from ZPH that the book had potential".

Mkuti's *Breakfast of Sjamboks*, on the other hand, is the product of a planned project. "The idea to write the book came about when I thought that the students, young as they are, have something to say about their suffering country," said the author.

What was more, the teacher was revulsed by "some of the things foreigners wrote" about Mozambique. "(So) I



wanted my kids to talk about their country . . . to be free to say the truth . . . not to be afraid about . . . not to be afraid of being put in prison."

But he must "control" the writing to guard against plagiarism, to make sure that the poems were not copied out from books or influenced by other people outside the classroom. So he would announce that the next period would be devoted to composing the poems in class.

What has been finally published is a synthesis of massive material produced — a distillation that speaks in varied but powerful voices about the suffering, yearnings and hopes of the young Mozambicans.

"I have learnt quite a lot by reading my stu-

dents' poems," says Mkuti, himself a trained journalist. "This time I respect my students . . . I think that teachers should respect students because the students have a lot of things to teach us."

Mkuti says he has set up a writing club at his school, probably the first one of its kind at schools in his country.

The next project is the publication of short stories, "which are very nice and which I think should be published as soon as possible".

He said that since publishing them in Portuguese might take longer "for economic reasons", he wanted to translate them into English and try to have them printed quickly.

At age 29, the man with a winning smile appears determined to use his pen as a powerful weapon in the defence of the motherland.

Meanwhile, exhibits at the Book Fair demonstrated efforts by local publishers to boost children's literature.

Apart from *The Beast of Fame* and *Breakfast of Sjamboks*, which were published by Zimbabwe Publishing House, College Press exhibited a new series of interesting titles for children (*First Library*).

These add to the other lists of children's books published by Longman Zimbabwe, Mambo Press and, to a smaller extent, by Chislya cho-Mukonto III's Manongezze Production and Nehanda Publishers, among others.

But the long and arduous task still remains of cultivating reading habits among children — a task which parents and teachers must share equally.



An upcoming young author and teacher in Mozambique, Daniel Motsi.



MKUTI is in love with a spanner . . . but he can write, too.