Webuye Youth Empowerment Training Center

Executive Summary

One of the key differences between the developed and developing nations is the access to information. Those who are information poor and less educated have fewer productive capabilities and options for their development. We have entered an information age where those able to attain the means to education are able to succeed and those who are not starve. It is critical to serving the needs of communities in Sub Saharan Africa to deliver an array of educational solutions in areas in which the people have a desire to learn.

Computer technologies have the power to meet numerous informational needs including but not limited to education, healthcare, agriculture, income generating activities, microfinance and banking, relief services, and electronic government. Bringing internet and communications technologies (ICT) to rural villages is like taking the people from total darkness into blinding light. The United Nations has said that the future of development lies in the hands of innovative technologies designed for developing countries.

There is no excuse for poverty. In a world of plenty no one should starve. Voices of Africa and other development innovators can eliminate poverty in Sub Saharan Africa through information empowerment driven by technology. To achieve this we must work together in solidarity for the benefit of all humanity. The power to connect the world as one village is here. It is the time.

The project, a partnership between Voices of Africa for Sustainable Development and the Government of Kenya, has established a Youth Empowerment Training Center in Webuye constituency of the Western province of Kenya to provide the necessary skills for youth to become full participants in the development process. Courses include Computer Basics, Research and Data Collection, Social Media, ICT for Development, Social Business, and Community Health. These courses will lead youth to create a healthy and sustainable locally community and economy.

Introduction to Voices of Africa for Sustainable Development

Vision Statement

Our vision is to live in a just world free of abject poverty. To this end, Voices of Africa will foster sustainable development in Sub-Saharan Africa through information empowerment, social business and fair trade.

Mission Statement

It is our mission to empower impoverished women and youth to improve their communities sustainably through the use of innovative and cutting edge information and communications technologies and fair trade income generation.

Objectives

- Empowering communities to take control of their own development through information and education

- To train both urban and rural women in Sub Saharan Africa to use information technology

- To use the internet as a voice for the people

- To foster international relationships and bridge the digital divide

- To provide sustainable solutions to the Millennium Development Goals through ICT

- To work in collaboration with women and youth to facilitate fair trade income generation

- To increase the fair trade market share for women and youth from Sub Saharan Africa

- To be a leader in the field of ICT for development from village to government policy

- To give communities the educational tools for development in the following critical areas:

  - Environmentally sustainable development: Energy, Organic agriculture, Agroforestry, Natural resource management, Appropriate technology, Waste management

  - Health: Public health, Childbirth, Nutrition, Primary care, HIV / AIDS

  - Income generation: Fair trade, Social entrepreneurship, Social business, ICT skills development, Business skills development

Summary of Research Data

Development rationale:

Information and communications technologies have the power to change the way we practice development throughout the world. The digital divide, defined by a lack of access to information for a specific population, symbolizes the largest difference between developed and developing countries: **the opportunity to obtain and utilize information**. The digital divide runs much deeper than hardware and software. While equipment is necessary it is not sufficient. The real heart of the digital divide is that those without access to information resources often suffer needlessly while the solutions to their problems are floating in the air.

The Internet is the single most powerful tool for rapid development. One example is the child who is ill with malaria who can easily be diagnosed using any of the 12,800,000 sites on the web that detail the disease and its symptoms. But without access to the Internet, the children suffer and many perish. In developed countries people often take for granted that the largest library in the world is soaring through the skies only waiting for a click to be released. For many rural people, ten minutes on the web with the understanding of its capabilities can change their lives forever.

In rural areas, the need for information cannot be overestimated. In the remote countryside, there are few schools with adequate resources and almost no community libraries. The lifesaving knowledge the people require has been completely beyond their grasp. With the Internet, their prayers have been answered and solutions to their problems can be found within seconds. As one rural women in the Western province of Kenya exclaimed, "It is like being brought from the darkness into the light."

Teaching Strategy

Youth Courses

Computer basics	Modelled after an International Computer's Drivers License curriculum
Research and data collection	Designed to promote community level data gathering and analysis of development issues
Social Media	Building networking online through social media and basic content creation
ICT for Development	How to leverage ICT for development purposes
Social Business	Business course on how to use profit generating models to create social impact
Community health	HIV/AIDS, nutrition, water and sanitation, malaria, ect.

Youth Training

The future of ICT is largely dependent on the quality and focus of the training the youth in the country receive. By making ICT training available in rural areas we are empowering an entire generation to become part of the Information Society. The contributions of the minds of these people will have the power to change Kenya.

The Webuye Youth Empowerment Center offers ICT4D training and Internet access to the community. Courses and Internet access will be fairly priced and the center will be completely self sustaining after the first year of operations. The Webuye Youth Empowerment Center will each be established in conjunction with a local community based organizations to build community capacity. Our primary objective is to empower the people to utilize knowledge to make more informed decisions about their lives and to build the local economy. More advanced courses will be offered at an additional fee. This ensures that small business owners have the necessary skills to run successful businesses.

Youth will take courses beginning in Computer Basics using a model ICDL curriculum and ending in Social Business. These youths will be prepared to be employed in the ICT sector in private small business and in the corporate sector. The Webuye Youth Empowerment Center and school lab projects feed into each other and act to serve create an information rich society.

The local students will be taught by university graduates from the United States, Europe, and Kenya as part of a cross cultural interchange. These researchers will be actively engaged in projects in these local communities as a part of their degree requirements.

Employment creation is vital in Kenya with the large unemployed youth population. The Webuye Youth Empowerment Center will create a number of young ICT entrepreneurs and give the skills necessary for gainful employment. The curriculum will be developed and adapted over time as the need arises.
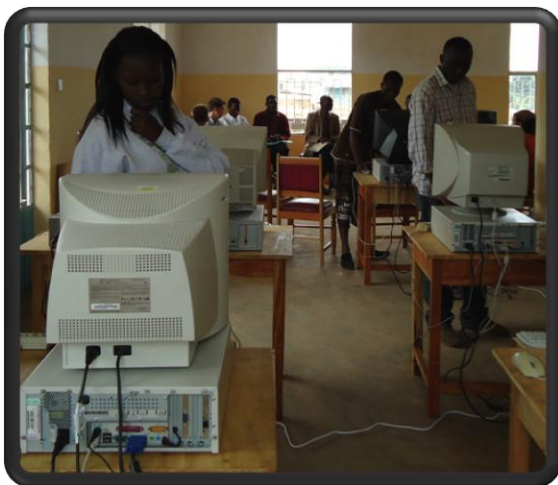
Constant monitoring and consistent evaluation will inform VOA4SD of how the Webuye Youth Empowerment Center is impacting local communities and about the information needs of the people. Monitoring and evaluation will be done by local and international volunteers with reports sent to stakeholders quarterly.

The Digital Classroom

The Webuye Youth Empowerment Center has one classroom with 20 computers. Computers and software were be provided by Camara Ireland, who work in 7 African countries providing computers to learning institutions. Students will all face the teacher to allow students to see one another in classroom discussions. This configuration facilitates knowledge sharing and can be easily captured via video from a stationary position.

The Webuye Youth Empowerment Center will be a hub of e-participation. Each class will be recorded via a web cam mounted to the wall. Students will help select images from each class to post to our blog. Webuye Youth Empowerment Center will stream the video online and encourage virtual participation through e-learning software. Our classroom will be our window to the outside world and their window in. It will exist in physical and virtual space to maximize international impact.

The digital classrooms will create content for the Internet as well leading to a plethora of educational materials on a wide variety of subject being available via video pertaining to local development issues. In terms of higher level education and knowledge sharing, VOA4SD has created a partnership with an organization named Knowledge for All, that is based on the success of Videolectures.net to provide lectures from experts and university professors on scientific subjects.

Open Source Software

We have chosen to teach utilizing the Ubuntu (http://www.ubuntu.com/products/whatisubuntu) open source operating system. Open source software is the preferred choice of many development organizations as all of the software is free of charge. The source code is by definition open. This allows ICT4D organizations to build and customize software for the sole purpose of providing tools for development to be freely distributed. Software includes but is not limited to: Open Office, Google Earth, Picasa, games for children, Scribus, Inkscape, VLC, Edubuntu Suite, firefox, GNUCash, Frontline SMS, and Ushahidi.

Research

At VOA4SD we believe that successful initiatives are constantly monitored and evaluated on a regular time schedule to ensure program goals and objectives are consistently met. Our approach in this field is three fold.

First, our organization history is different as we are all public health development professionals. VOA4SD was created by two female graduate students from Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine. We have been a completely volunteer run organization with assistance from PeaceCorp volunteers and college students from both Kenya and abroad.

Crystal Kigoni, the Executive Director, has been studying ICT4D and sustainable development for the past ten years. She has spent the last three years in the field implementing 3 training centers within community based organizations and gathering research data about reaching rural and uneducated populations with development information through ICT4D.

We are drafting and implement a monitoring and evaluation strategy to cover all potential areas of impact from the policy to the village level. This includes our donor relations and financial accounting. The entire program will be integrated to provide the highest level of transparency and accountability.

Our second approach is through a partnership with local universities and other institutions of higher learning and independent research groups to encourage research into the impacts of digital village programs across the country. Through partnerships with local institutions such as the University of East Africa and Strathmore University, Kenyan students will be given the opportunity to research the impact of ICTs for dissemination through a variety of academic and media outlets.

Lastly, through the internet we will publish to the entire world daily reports on the progress of our program. Our students will be required to do the same. Documentation from the written word to streaming video will be collected and distributed via the Voices of Africa website. Students will interact with other researchers and wananchi online worldwide. The world will be watching.

Employment for Graduates

Young people who come to study ICT4D will be taught to be self employed in their own social businesses and are in high demand by the ICT sector. Few schools have such a demand for its graduates. The social businesses created by graduates will be monitored for impact through research trained graduates. VOA4SD will also encourage employment in the internet and social business sectors. Currently 20% of all Americans are employed in the knowledge economy. The Kenyan economy must follow suit to reach the Kenyan government's Vision 2030 objectives.

Program Sustainability

Accountability, transparency, and impact assessment are the three keys to program sustainability. Every dollars allocated to the project will be accounted for by the Project management and accounting team. Donors and investors will receive monthly statements of account. Interested parties can request accounting statements

Sustainability means more to VOA4SD than just our bottom line. In all previous projects VOA4SD has advocated and continues to advocate for the usage of ultra low powered computers utilizing solar technology. We maximize the use of the internet for all correspondence to minimize the environmental impact of printing and shipping.

All VOA4SD social businesses are assessed for their environmental impact. We believe that renewable resources such as solar energy should be the cornerstone of our economy. Alleviating the need for fossil fuels and large unsustainable electrical generation such as coal, large hydrodams, and nuclear. Businesses will also be assessed in terms of long term environmental impact such as energy consumption, water consumption, and waste generation. VOA4SD will encourage our graduates to seek solutions to the problems in the communities in regards to environmental degradation and create profit generating enterprises. The assessment forms will be created as VOA4SD develops its monitoring and evaluation research strategy.

Sustainability also means that the impact on the community must continue and grow as we do. Instead of VOA4SD growing and reducing its on the ground impact with time, VOA4SD will make concrete on the ground impact. Through our monitoring and evaluation, we will see what works and what does not in terms of actual poverty alleviation. The strategies that do not work will be replaced by ones that do.

Financial Sustainability

Financial sustainability is a condition when revenue of the Youth Empowerment Center is greater than the overall expenditures.

To achieve this highly desired state

1. It will behave more like a private enterprise in its administration and setting of goals.

2. It will rely on demand –driven approaches by starting with basic services and increasing their service offering in response to the demand of the local market.(it will identify, develop and offer customer-oriented services)

3. There will be diversification of services and therefore development opportunities and revenue

4. It will be guided by a sound business plan and a long term social and business strategy to ensure survival.

5. The staff of the Youth Empowerment Center will deal with competition in the provision of ICT services by defining a unique service profile that makes them stand out the competition.

6. The Youth Empowerment Center will balance the challenges of community development responsibility, sustainability and making enough profits to pay for the operation to ensure harmony between these competing challenges.

Online Presence

Oh the wonderful world for the web! VOA4SD has regular communications with development professionals from over 30 countries. We are continually updating our website and receive over 1,000 visits per month. We have had visits from over 200 countries in the last year. In six months on Facebook, we have added 600+ new supporters. We have other virtual volunteers waiting to begin.

Voices of Africa Website: An African development portal

The VOA4SD website has been designed in Wordpress Open Source format with CiviCRM for its relationship management. The website boasts such features as photo uploads, blogging, online surveys, social networking, and continually updated links to development information. The premise of the website is to create a safe, positive environment for users to experience the best features of the web. Our aim is to bring together development professionals, donors, and others internationally with Africans engaging in community development. We are encouraging other telecentres, community groups, and individuals throughout Sub-Saharan Africa to engage in dialogue about sustainable development online.

Please view our website at http://www.voicesofafrica.org. Our students will be taught how to generate content online and will be required as an assignment to write on the blog and to post photos at the end of every class session. It is important to VOA4SD that content flows from both the Global North to the Global South AND back again. It is just as important for information FROM **developing** countries to enter into the global digital age as it is for information FROM **developed** countries to come to the villages.

Voices of Africa for Sustainable Development is committed to fighting poverty through innovative ICT4D projects throughout Sub Saharan Africa and to creating an international solidarity network for poverty alleviation. Through our partnership with the community, VOA4SD will empower development innovators to create tangible, on the ground evidence of the social, political, and economic change possible through ICT4D.

We need your support to show the world the potential of the rural village youth. Please give generously to support our work in the rural villages of Webuye constituency and to make a model for ICT development in other communities throughout Sub Saharan Africa. This is the time for Africa. Together we can.

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