

Health Education and Empowerment for Rural Women in the Kyamulibwa Area, Uganda using Solar-Powered MP3-Players

Context description

Every six seconds a child under five dies. Most of these deaths are entirely preventable. Diarrhea alone kills 2,195 children every day—more than AIDS, malaria, and measles combined. Most of these lives could be easily saved by educating mothers about very simple things like adequate sanitation, personal hygiene and rehydration.

Rural women are the poorest of the poor, the least literate, the most exploited, and the most marginalized of all social groups in developing countries. They often remain invisible and unheard and this is worsening their positions of marginality. The lack of health care and other social services makes rural women and their children especially vulnerable to health problems.

Three-quarters of all illness in the developing world could be prevented by better nutrition, water, sanitation, immunization and health education. And health education could be considered to be the most important, since it creates the awareness for the relevance of all other health-related factors.

Rural women make up more than two-thirds of the world's 796 million illiterate people. Heavy workloads combined with frequent pregnancies and other effects of chronic poverty have a major impact on their health and nutritional status. Findings show that there is a strong need for health information of all types among those women. Health information should be repackaged and disseminated in appropriate forms suitable for them.

Audio recordings of spoken, health-, family- and work-related contents can be used to make this information available to the illiterate. Simple and cost-efficient technologies like solar-powered audio players allow the distribution of those vital contents even to remote areas without access to electricity.

Healthy women can become empowered women, who are major catalysts for development, as they re-invest their money in their children's health, nutrition, and education. Accessible health-related education and information about family planning, income generation possibilities etc. for illiterate rural women in developing countries is necessary and it's possible.

Beneficiaries of the project

10,000 rural women in remote areas in Kyamulibwa (Uganda) and its surroundings will benefit from this project. Kyamulibwa is located in the region of Central Region, approximately 64 miles away from Central Region's capital Kampala. The women we will address live in little villages in the outback. They have never attended schools, so they cannot read or write. And there is no electricity, so radio and TV cannot be used to disseminate information. These women lack even the most basic education about health, family planning, farming or other income generation possibilities.

The beneficiaries will be carefully selected based on their educational background, literacy and access to health information and life skills training. We will cooperate with a local NGO (Projekthilfe Uganda e. V.) to guarantee the best possible effective approach here.

Goals and Objectives of the project

The objective of this project is to provide health education, economical knowledge and other life skills (empowerment) using solar-powered MP3 Players to be distributed to 10,000 illiterate rural women in Kyamulibwa, Kalungu district.

The MP3 Players are rugged and easy to use devices that have been developed by URIDU, a German NGO. The URIDU Player contains more than 400 relevant questions and answers about the following topics: Menstrual Hygiene, Pregnancy and Childbirth, Breastfeeding, Nutrition, Cleanliness, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), HIV and AIDS, Substance Abuse, Growing Older, Disabilities, Infertility, Problems of the Urinary System, Cancer, Pneumonia and Tuberculosis, Malaria, Mental Health, Family Planning, Child Injury Prevention, Child Health, Advice for Girls, Violence against Women, Sexual Violence, Family Conflicts, Suicide Prevention, Safety at Work and Income Generation Possibilities.

The texts are recorded by a native speaker in Luganda, the mother tongue of the women.

The URIDU Player was conceived for small group listening - it therefore fosters discussion, exchange and (self-help) group building. It's a tool for change. The Player operates in harsh environments and its built-in solar panel makes it independent from the power grid. A special design makes it impossible to use the MP3 Players for any other purpose to avoid any misuse of the device.

Assuming an average group size of 8 - 12 women, a total of 1,000 solar-powered MP3 Players will have to be produced and distributed among the 10,000 beneficiaries. The main goal is to achieve health awareness and prevention, life skills and resilience, self-esteem and financial empowerment of every women addressed. A secondary goal is the establishment of women groups, which should act as support groups in order to foster the personal development of local women. The overall goal is an improvement of the living conditions for the beneficiaries and subsequently for their families and communities. The project is supposed to inspire women to embrace a positive change in their lives on several levels.

Stakeholders of the project

The project will be a cooperation between Projekthilfe Uganda e.V. and the NGO URIDU gGmbH.

URIDU will be responsible for the development, production and shipment of the MP3 Players. URIDU is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that empowers illiterate rural women in developing and emerging countries by providing vital knowledge that helps them change their living conditions. URIDU uses innovative technology to spread authoritative knowledge about health, nutrition, family planning, child care, work and more. URIDU has successfully introduced this approach in several African countries. More information about URIDU is available on www.uridu.org

Projekthilfe Uganda e.V. will arrange local distribution of the players including a basic introduction on the use of the players within groups. Therefore Projekthilfe Uganda e.V. will select groups of women in specific areas in Kyamulibwa and its surroundings. Projekthilfe Uganda e.V. will also arrange follow-up meetings with the beneficiaries in order to evaluate project success and to discuss specific areas of interest with the women involved in the project.

Cost of the project

Production and shipment of 1,000 solar-powered MP3-Players (including audio recording):

10,000 US\$

Funding of local distribution costs will be generated by Projekthilfe Uganda e.V.

The Solar-Powered MP3 Player

CHARACTERISTICS

- Capacity: 500 hours of spoken text
- polymer lithium-ion battery
- 5-14 hours of battery
- 10.4 x 5.8 x 1.3 cm
- 68 grams

CONTENTS

- More than 400 question and answers
- 3 Main topics: health, family, work
- More than 30 Chapters



BATTERY CHARGING

- USB Charger: 1 hour
- USB port (PC): 3 hours
- Solar panel: 6 hours

SPEAKER

Built-in speaker for small group listening.
Headphone jack to connect to external speaker for larger groups.

The URIDU Model of Empowerment

The contents available on the solar-powered MP3 Players are based on a 3-Step-Model of Empowerment developed by URIDU. All contents have been carefully selected and adapted by psychologists, and custom contents have been developed by experts. Most of the contents are based on trusted resources and on the work of decades of countless development aid workers. These contents derive from sources such as Hesperian Health Guides and UNICEF Facts for Life.

STEP 1: HEALTH INFORMATION AND PREVENTION

The basic step is to help a woman improve her physical and mental health. We do so by telling her how she can prevent common health problems by simple means of hygiene or nutrition, or how to protect herself from infections, or how to take good care of herself in periods of special sensitivity (like during menstruation, pregnancy or menopause, for example). Being in good health is the base condition sine qua non for any other empowerment step. Only a woman who feels sane and strong can successfully deal with other challenges.

STEP 2: LIFE SKILLS AND RESILIENCE

The second step is to help a woman improve her family situation. In many families in developing countries, women have little influence over important household decisions (such as family planning, health care, daily household spending etc.). Studies show that this can put their own health as well as their children's health at risk. Empowerment through knowledge is key in the fight against practices that deny women a say in household decisions. For example, every woman deserves to have control over her reproductive life. Due to the lack of reliable contraceptive methods, unwanted pregnancies are a big problem for millions of women in developing countries. Therefore, we provide them with helpful information on family planning, as well as information about safe abortion (where legal). We also give advice how to deal better with and take their stand in family conflicts (e. g. with husband or in-laws), or how to protect themselves against domestic violence.

STEP 3: SELF-ESTEEM AND FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT

The final step to empower a woman is to help her reach financial independency. As most of the societies in developing countries base on a strictly patriarchal system, women traditionally are at a distinct disadvantage in terms of economic affluence because they earn less than men and tend to own fewer assets; often they are even totally excluded by law from owning property. Education is key to change here; therefore many of our contents deal with the topic of equality of men and women, as well as the importance of providing girls with the same education and economic opportunities as boys.