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Proposal

Introduction

I am a junior at Amherst College studying Political Science and African studies. I am currently on a one year study abroad program at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in England. My interest lies in Development Studies which fosters high-level research and discourse about key issues facing the development of poorer countries, particularly the African continent. I secured an internship with the Haller Foundation in the U.K. to gain a hands-on experience on developmental issues. Haller Foundation is a grassroots Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) working in Kenya with communities to enable them attain self-sufficiency through a unique and holistic approach to the provision of water, agricultural training, health, education, and micro-enterprise. My exposure in Haller motivated me to research ways of empowering girls and women in coastal Kenya.

Summary of Pilot Project

The proposed pilot project will involve setting up a micro-enterprise initiative for a women's group in coastal Kenya in the production and sale of sanitary towels to their immediate communities and surrounding villages. The goal of the project is to make available sanitary towels at low-cost prices to school-aged girls and women in the area. Right now, young girls and women cannot afford imported sanitary towels and stay at home during their menstrual cycle for a period of one to two weeks. This project will enable girls to remain in school and women to continue working in their homes and farms during this period.

The Product

The design and production of these sanitary towels will utilize available low-cost raw materials which encourage self-sufficiency in these communities and leads to a self-sustaining project. The proposed sanitary towels will use a design pattern from a women's group in Tamil Nadu, India. The towels use 100% cotton flannel and a nylon protective casing which has a lifecycle of two years. These cloth menstrual pads (also called Eco-Pads) require hand washing in salty cold water or with soap where available. These Eco-Pads are less likely to cause rashes, contact Dermatitis, remove the risk of Toxic Shock Syndrome, and help women that are afflicted with certain types of Vaginitis. Women with sensitive skins and allergies will find the cloth pads more comfortable against their skins.

Existing Challenges:

Most girls in Kenya do not attend school during their menstrual cycle because of the high cost of purchasing sanitary towels and the fear of (accidental leaks). The current practice is to use old rag cloths which cause leakages and present a high risk of infection. Due to possibility of leakages, the girls remain at home missing up to 1-1½ weeks every month of the year. This results in the girls falling behind in school work and ultimately dropping out of school. By dropping out of school, the girls are unable to complete their education and break the poverty cycle in their lives. Unlike the *Always initiative* which only donates sanitary pads to these poor areas; this Eco- Pad project aims to create a degree of financial self-sufficiency and provide a long-term viable alternative to their current practice.

Goals

Empowering mothers and young girls: This pilot project will generate additional sources of income resulting in financial independence for the women from their husbands. Running a business builds confidence by enabling the women to take control and ownership of their lives. The women would become role models for their daughters and young girls in these communities.

Stimulate a micro-economy: The pilot project will help stimulate a micro- economy in the communities through the sale of cloth sanitary towels (Eco-Pads) thus generating income. These Eco-pads can also be marketed to rural health programs for female health and family planning. Haller has committed to use the Eco- pads in its related health's programs such as the Female Health and Family Planning workshops and Repro Ruler.

Encourage education: A project as simple as the production of cloth sanitary towels is a critical stepping stone that will allow these school girls complete their education. According to UNICEF statistics, (one in ten) school aged African girls drop out of school at puberty or during their menstrual cycles due to the high cost of purchasing sanitary towels¹. As a result, use of these Eco-Pads will assist the girls in staying in school and completing their education thereby transforming the girls and effecting a change in their communities.

Encourage healthy lifestyles and behaviors: According to the Center for Adolescence, 13% of girl students in Africa become pregnant at the age of 14. This high level of pregnancy during puberty has been attributed to the lack of education on how the female reproductive system works including their menstrual cycle. Young girls often become pregnant and leave school. This Eco-Pad project would complement other Government initiatives (local and federal) to teach young girls and women about female health through educational workshops in their local schools and communities.

¹ <http://www.ungei.org/>

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Train women with life- long skills in business: The pilot project will provide the women with the opportunity to run their own business and gain skills such as sewing, bookkeeping, and money management.

Expected Outcomes

There are many expected outcomes from this project. Women in these communities will become financial independent. The additional income would enable them purchase basic necessities for their families. There would also be a reduction in the drop-out rates for school girls while at the same time enhancing female health education in these communities. Finally, women will gain key skills during the project such as sewing, bookkeeping which make them more employable in other jobs.

Projected Timescales

In April 2009, Haller in conjunction with the local community liaison (Mr. Gideon Amboga) will conduct a 2 weeks survey and investigation to select a suitable community for the Eco-Pad project. Thereafter, they will meet with community leaders for discussions, site clearing and preparation of the land for construction for 2 weeks. We anticipate that the construction of the Eco-Pad workshop commencing in May will last for 7-8weeks. Once the building construction has been completed, the workshop will be equipped with up to 8 peddle sewing machines. I expect to be in Kenya in June to supervise the completion of the construction, purchase of the sewing machines and hiring of the workshop trainers. The hiring of the trainers (namely sewing, health, and business) will be important in updating the training manual which I had previously developed. I also intend to meet with the women group to discuss the project and incorporate any of their ideas into the training manual. The intensive training will commence in early July. The project will continue to rely on the support of Haller Foundation's existing community relationship and infrastructure. Haller has long standing ties with these communities and understands the socio-political and cultural undertones. To date, Haller works with these communities with support from community mid-wives and has indentified that women and girls who have attended workshops on menstruation and sexual health have not had issue with openly discussing their problems and wanting to find out more. To this end, the Davis Foundation along with Haller Foundation will be identified as sponsors of the Eco-Pad project on a large signage board placed conspicuously in front of the newly completed Eco-pad workshop. This will place the project in the minds of the community and environs and will be a good advertisement for the sale of the Eco-Pads later on.

Monitoring and Evaluation (Production, Sales, an ongoing sustainability)

The cost of constructing Eco-Pad workshop will be advanced to Haller before my arrival in June. A legal contract to complete construction by June 30, 2009 will be signed between Haller foundation and myself. Haller will advance disbursement on a pay-by-progress plan. Funds will be disbursed for each section of the construction process: (foundation, superstructure, roofing, carpentry, floor finish, electrical, and plumbing). Haller will provide receipts and invoices for the construction of the workshop. In addition, completed progressive pictures of the different stages of construction will be forwarded to me before I arrive to Kenya. I will work with Haller to develop an effective monitoring and evaluation system based on input from the women in the community. The efficiency of the project will be assessed by the creation of a work plan which measures the actual (daily, weekly, and monthly) production output of the women. The profitability index would measure that the women are generating enough profits from the business to allow them re-invest and sustain the project on a long-term basis.

The socio-economic impact will be measured by conducting sample surveys, mini interviews, recorded and direct observations on the participants of the projects. Based on developed indicators, we will measure how many girls go to school before and after use of the Eco-Pads. We will also work with the school community to measure whether the use of the Eco-Pads has impacted school performance. The indicators will also measure how the increase in the women's income and the multiplier effects on their households and communities at large. The spending and saving patterns of the women will also be measured. Based on the results from our evaluations, we will make needed modifications to enhance the project to a point where it can be replicated in other communities.

Sustainability: A portion of the profit would be re-invested back into the project to ensure its sustainability. This will be managed in tandem with the selected women's group and Haller as an advisor.

Peace: Through the empowerment of the girls and women, the Eco-Pad project would help promote peace by providing the tools to escape poverty. This would reduce the need to engage in or be victims of violent acts. As the women become financially independent, they become agents of change and gain confidence to fight against injustices in their societies.

¹ <http://www.ungei.org/>