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PIL2014: L'Union Fait la Force (Unity Is Strength)

PIL is a summer project that was born to provide the youth with a model to maximize the opportunities offered to them by guiding them in the creation of their own micro-enterprises and community projects. PIL believes in the youth and considers it to be a key component in the overall reconstruction and development of our country in its post-war stages, and a tool for peace-building. Thus, this program is dedicated to the promotion of an entrepreneurial spirit and a sense of personal discipline amongst the Ivorian youth. This year's edition entitled, "l'union fait la force", emphasizes the role of civic engagement and collaboration for maintaining a stable nation, and extends the reach and scope of the previously successful PIL 2013 to the "War Capital" of Cote d'Ivoire, Bouake. Finally, the partnering this year of the founder of PIL, Nadine Zoro, and an Franklin & Marshall student from Ghana, Mawupemor Kofi Alorzuke, also sets the stage for future expansion of PIL into Ghana.

Background

The gospel of democracy continues to gather momentum in most sub-Saharan African nations, with the number of conflicts plummeting. However, with a relatively high continental unemployment rate combined with an abundant youth population, it follows that a tactful mobilization of the growing youth population to compliment the current situation would be Africa's best shot at a continuing upslope. With about 44.7% of the population under 18 years and 29% of its population under the poverty line, although Ghana has maintained a high level of political stability, these statistics expose an imminent threat to the maintenance of the status quo. Ivory Coast on the other hand, with about 40% of its population under 18 years and 42.7% of its population under the poverty line, recently came out of conflict and is currently faced with a task of building and maintaining peace. These high youth populations possess great potential; potential which can be manipulated either to the benefit, or in the case of the Ivory Coast to the detriment of the country. Nobel laureate and First President of Ivory Coast, Houphouet Boigny shares our sentiments aptly in his quote, "Peace is not a word; it is a behaviour". Cultivating the right behaviour will lead to peace. In the same vein as wise Nelson Mandela who said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world", the Ivorian Leadership project has realized the peace-building potential of education in Africa.

The "Projet Ivoirien de Leadership" was created to serve as a tool for the Ivorian youth to participate actively and in unison to the country's development. The outcomes of the PIL 2013 edition convinced us of the increasing potential for this model of leadership and civic engagement to contribute to social change in other Ivorian communities and beyond. For a bigger impact and in response to the demand of the previous participants, PIL 2014 with the title "L'union fait la force" meaning "Unity is strength" will be held in Bouake, the country's second largest city. Bouake was occupied by the rebels for more than eight years during the Ivorian civil war. PIL realized that the biggest impact on peace should be made in areas that were deeply affected by the war in order to have a wider impact on peacemaking. Also, some participants in PIL2013 requested that PIL move to their locality, as they believe that the emotional and intellectual impact PIL had on them can be helpful to their fellows. Bouake which was called "the war capital" is in a state of political and social reconstruction, and PIL wants to participate in the move towards development in this area.

Theory of change

With its practical and creative curriculum focusing on the importance of leadership and civic engagement in the economic development of a country, PIL provides the youth (aged 14-18) with a personal mentorship program led by teenagers like themselves. PIL is designed to help students develop their personality and their ideas for future micro-enterprises and community projects in order to be activists in the prevention of new armed conflicts. We will introduce and contrast the idea of civic engagement in the western world to the almost nonexistence of civic engagement in the Ivory Coast. This comparison will help people understand the developmental potential of voluntarism. The more people we get to be involved in civic engagement, the bigger the social impact will be. Thus, through entrepreneurial-leadership, we will move a step closer toward bringing about development. We believe that the affects of these initiatives will also spread from our participants to other young people and motivate them to pay it forward in even more communities.

Collaboration between people from a different cultural and socio-economic background with a focus on maintaining peace is a way to apply lessons learned from one African country to its sister nation. Coming from a different and more peaceful country, Ghana, Kofi will provide the Ivorian youth with a different perspective. Kofi will share with them his upbringing in a peaceful country and the benefit this environment had on him as a person. In addition to his passion for change in Africa, Kofi, an Economics major, will also bring his knowledge of economics to PIL. This adjustment to PIL will provide cross-cultural knowledge, knowledge of a unified

country whose peaceful practices can be adapted to the Ivory Coast. It is an illustration of how united Africans can drive continental or even global change. Indeed, this venture will also be a learning experience for Kofi that will be applied to a youth development project in his Ghanaian community in the future. With over 60,000 street children living in Accra, Ghana, through PIL, Kofi will be able to administer this curriculum to these children as a way of re-channeling their energies towards creating productive solutions to problems in their communities. PIL's impact will therefore be broadened into a pan-African initiative. As a result, the project will achieve its long-term vision of playing a significant role in the development of a harmonious population of youth, and a peaceful Africa with a self-sustained African economy.

Progress to date (Supporting documents available upon request)

Using the local help of some motivated young university students, The Ivorian Leadership Project (PIL) 2013 edition, opened Monday, July 15, 2013. This edition was held in the premises of the Methodist Secondary School of Cocody, with an average attendance of 53 teenagers. The participants' interests and passion about positive change is the reason why PIL is planning to create entrepreneurial Leadership Clubs in High schools. Also, two of last year's participants were selected as finalists for the African Leadership Academy admission. PIL impacted their view on change making and entrepreneurial leadership to the extent where they want to further their education in this field and be agents of positive change in the world. Previous discussion topics focused mainly on emotional intelligence, courage, self-esteem, being proactive, and personal branding. The topics of unity and brotherhood in decision-making were the main examples used to remind the youth that they need to be better humans for their country's well being. Participants also had the opportunity to investigate attitudes about cleanliness and run an awareness campaign in the vicinity of the University Hospital of Cocody. Rather than despair, they proved that as young leaders who could do something to improve the situation. The young leaders made beads with newspapers during their art activity. They made products, sold them to a local NGO, and used the funds for the betterment of their communities.

Steps from the idea to the actions:

All the steps below will be completed by beginning of July 2014 for the project to be held from the 4th of August to the 16th of August in Bouake:

- Recruit a team of local university students to help sensitize high school students
- Create a website to promote peace in Cote d'Ivoire with pictures, videos and inspirational messages
- Design a progressive curriculum emphasizing the power of the youth in maintaining peace with different levels to give the participants the opportunity to deepen their entrepreneurial leadership knowledge
- Contact officials and schools in Bouake before April. High school students will be selected based on their willingness to bring change to their respective schools and communities.
- Generate a network of Ivorian entrepreneurs to mentor the participants after the project.
- Invite other young people with success stories to share their experiences with the participants.
- Business competition within participants to create a business or community service run by the participants to get them into understanding the "idea to action" concept

Projects for future impacts:

- Each year, the project will take place in a different city to allow different regions of the country to benefit from the various community projects generated by the youth, and thus spark or contribute to development in the different regions (i.e. the second edition is happening in Bouake instead of Abidjan, where it happened last year) and also different countries(i.e. Ghana)
- Entrepreneurial Leadership Clubs will be established in 3 schools as a pilot to expand the impact to a broader audience
- The "I am a leader too!" tour around three suburbs of Abidjan, where brochures with some of the material taught during the program and T-shirts will be distributed to leave the population(including parents) with something to remember after the program. During this tour, workshops for parents will be held to discuss ways in which they can play a part in developing tomorrow's leaders.
- In the long-run, PIL dreams to implement a leadership and entrepreneurship learning centre with rooms which could be used for conferences and events by the public. The library and the events can help make PIL a self-sustained project in the years to come.