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Shoemaking project at the Unique Continental Centre For Handicapped: Ibadan, Nigeria

Introduction:

The Unique Continental Centre For Handicapped (UCCFH) Sawo Area, Iyana Church in Ibadan, Nigeria, was established in September 2012 to teach vocational skills to the intellectually and physically disabled in order to empower them and enable them to live independently. Without these skills, most disabled Nigerians are forced to beg on the streets. The Centre engages in many areas of vocational training, including computer skills, business management, weaving and tie-dye, and animal husbandry. The Centre also provides food and housing for the disabled students until they graduate with the skills to find a job and sustain themselves.

Background info and problem:

The WHO estimates that there are approximately 19 million disabled people living in Nigeria, comprising 12% of the country's population. Disabled people constitute one of the most socially excluded and economically marginalized groups within society. There is an underlying ideological belief in Nigeria that disabled people should be addressed through "charity and welfare". Hence, social policy issues regarding disabled people are categorically not acknowledged in terms of human rights. Consequently, the government does not sufficiently fund programs like those of the UCCFH; instead, these organizations have to rely on charity, which is not regular or reliable. In this Centre's case, funding challenges force the program to sponsor fewer disabled people. Furthermore, employees go on strikes when the Centre is unable to pay them, and sometimes the Centre must reduce the number of meals per day for the enrolled students. This financial obstacle undermines the objectives of the Centre and the peace it can bring to the lives of many disabled Nigerians.

Proposed solution:

The UCCFH can benefit from a lucrative business that will generate money to meet its financial needs, increase its enrollment, and sustain its programs over time. I have identified shoemaking as a promising revenue generating business because the Nigerian government recently banned the importation of all footwear, with the exception of athletic shoes, canvas shoes, and safety shoes used in industrial, medical, and emergency settings. If provided with capital to purchase machines and materials, the Centre could employ one or two professional shoemakers who will teach and work with the students to produce shoes for sale. In doing so, the Centre will not only use the shoemaking project to teach students lifelong skills, but also to employ disabled students and sustain the Centre with the revenues.

Feasibility and future prospects of the project:

The ban on imported shoes creates a large demand, ensuring that many Nigerians will purchase the shoes produced by the Centre's students. Large groups of potential patrons include the Nigerian Army and Navy, the Nigerian Police, the Civil defense, private security outfits, and the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). The shoemaking project will allow disabled students to contribute to the Nigerian economy and show that they can care for themselves. With regards

to sustainability, this project can sustain itself because there is a ready-made market for local shoe producers and because the Centre can use some of the profits to buy more materials for production. Moreover, shoes wear out, children out grow their shoes, and people need shoes for special occasions—hereby creating an endless need for shoes. This UCCFH Centre is located in the Sawo, Iyana Church Area, the neighborhood my family currently lives in. The proximity of the Centre will allow me to continue to take an active role in the project. I also plan to set up a website about the Centre that will increase its visibility, attract donations, and advertise and market shoes produced by the students.

Investing in Peace:

This project will help change the lives of many physically and intellectually challenged people currently begging on the streets of Nigeria. They will learn important skills in a profitable venture at this residential Centre, where there is an existing structure for accommodation and workshops. By contributing to Nigeria's economy and sustaining the Centre's programs, this project could become a model for other institutions for the handicapped that are suffering from insufficient government funds. Also, individuals can graduate from the school with shoemaking skills and the ability to work for an independent employer or even own a business. This would be a life changing experience for many disabled individuals who have been written off by their families, friends, and local community at large.

Personal connection and inspiration:

My father used to be the principal of a similar institution for the handicapped, Rehabilitation Centre For Disabled Persons (RCFDP) in the Moniya Area of Ibadan. He worked there for 16 years, until his retirement in 2007. While my father worked at RCFDP, my family lived in the Centre alongside the disabled students. I grew up seeing the day-to-day challenges of people with disabilities and how the insufficient government funds deprived them of the peace that the Centre is supposed to provide. Although my father played a huge role in developing RCFDP, I believe the Centre was also a blessing to us because it was a source of living for my family. In fact, this shoemaking idea emerged because I remembered the RCFDP Centre had a shoemaking department, but it was poorly funded so they could only use it for teaching. Besides, there was not a dire need for local shoe producers until the recent ban on imported shoes. So as someone who feels very fortunate to be at Dartmouth and have access to opportunities like this, I believe this project can help me give back and bring peace to many disabled people in Nigeria and the employees of the UCCFH Centre.

Schedule: My plan is to be in Nigeria for a month. **Week 1:** Meet with the principal of the Centre to discuss plans and purchase all materials. Have a presentation event to present the materials to the institution in front of the students, Centre's employees, and people in the community. **Week 2:** In conjunction with the matron and principal, we will select students who we believe are physically and intellectually capable of learning and producing shoes. Also have safety training for the students to teach them how to handle the machines. **Week 3:** Production of shoes begin and I will set up the website. **Week 4:** Production continues and we will have a 2-day open house to the public. The principal and I will visit the Commissioner of police, the Army head quarters in Ibadan, and local stores that sells shoes to discuss the possibility of a contract with the Centre. Through my previous contact with the Army headquarters, I was told that they would patronize the project, as it would be the Army's way of giving to the disabled.