

Reshaping the global village

Written by Mfon Archibong and Dr. Anita Davis-DeFoe
Saturday, 04 May 2013 10:18



In the words of Dr. Fazle Hasan Abed, the founder of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), one of the largest non-governmental educational organizations in the world, now reaching nearly 140 million people in nine countries. "We thought nationally, worked locally, and looked for inspiration globally."

The GRI concept of social transformation birthed in Ikot Uso Akpan Itam, Itu Local government area of Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, is being modeled after the work of BRAC. Early in 2006, my wife and I asked ourselves what difference could \$500 or \$1000 make in a remote village where the average woman makes a living of only about \$40 a month? The answer to this question was not in doubt, but rather to take action that could fuel change, so we started as an incubator.

Ikot Uso Itam is located about 10 miles north of Uyo, the capital of Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. It has a population of 250 people with 5% literacy. The main livelihood of this community is local farming and petty local trading. More than 90% of the community cannot afford to send their children to school and those who can certainly give priority to their male children first. Female children marry early and move on with their fate.

GRI Microenterprise Concept



The concept of social enterprise has already been practiced in Ikot Okubo, initiated by Enobong Abasi of Hope KeAbasi Foundation, a NGO. Locating Enobong was not easy in order for me to

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learn what works and what does not. Eventually, we connected and decided to have Hope KeAbasi Foundation and Grace Restoration International collaborate in the area of training local women on money management, each of us committing to funding our respectful community villages.

So what can \$1000 do in a community where the average monthly income is less than \$40? The answer to this question is simple-One thousand dollars can break generational poverty, empower women to be self-reliance, provide education, and improve access to health care for a poor rural women. The \$1000 I invested was changed to the local currency and divided among ten women to use as a catalyst for trading for a period of one year. The loan amount has a circle of one year under which 10% interest is assessed. Interests paid helps to add additional borrowers. GRI expanded the same services to neighboring villages sharing the same common market. The borrowers trade with local farm products and non-farm products. Today, GRI has reached 4 villages within the community. There is a 100% return for all loans on time. GRI in collaboration with Hope KeAbasi also provides financial literacy information for all the borrowers.

GRI Microenterprise Impact



Eka Sam, in Ikot Uso Akpan remarked, "God bless Mfon Archibong and GRI for loaning us money to trade. Now, I can send my children to school, and provide food for them. As he blessed this widow, God will bless him and his family."

In the neighboring village, the President of the group, Mrs. Mary Ita Essien said "If it had not been for Mfon Archibong, our women would have had no voice; we were only known to be in the kitchen and to make babies, with the help of the loan; we do not have to just rely on our husbands. We support the family too; we asked God to protect and bless him so he can give more. All the women in the community believe God answered their prayers by sending GRI to empower them and bless them." In addition to the microenterprise, the women from the 4 villages have come together to discuss common issues around health and other social development issues. They have become the first responders for themselves and their families. Together, these women have created a monthly health forum where they meet to discuss

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maternal health, and preventable diseases including sexually transmitted diseases.

Dr. Anita Davis-DeFoe visited the Ikot Uso Itam incubator, met with the women to learn about their microenterprises, as well as to share resource information, and show them products that are made in the Caribbean that could be replicated in Africa. "In the face of a host of unmet basic quality of life needs, these women have embraced micro-business concepts and are learning to operate profitable enterprises with the start-up funds provided by GRI. I can only begin to imagine the future impact that will result from the expansion of the incubator as investment in the initiative continues to grow. I was elated to hear about their progress, as several of these women signed up to become involved in the GRI/AFIA Design House, a social enterprise I am partnering with GRI to launch as a tool to provide opportunities for women in Africa and the Caribbean."

GRI hopes to set up a funded program where the women will go from door-to-door talking about malaria prevention, clean water and sanitation. With funding and program support, GRI can transform global villages one at a time, reducing generational poverty through education, training and economic development; improve access to health care, and improve the quality of life for all.

Dr. Fazle Hasan Abed, the 2011 winner of the World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE) stresses that "education is the fundamental catalyst for change" and is central to addressing the issue of inequity. GRI agrees and will continue to use education and the full engagement of the people it seeks to serve as the solution.