



WOMENSTRUST

POKUASE VILLAGE

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FALL 2009 NEWSLETTER

“ *WomensTrust is probably the best project I have seen in Africa* ”

When you have been struggling on the frontier for five-plus years, solving problems and innovating – with a fair share of skeptics looking on – nothing reinforces your commitment more than recognition of your success by an acknowledged leader in the field.

The accolade above was given to WomensTrust this fall by Bill Easterly, author of *White Man's Burden* and a world-renowned expert on the effectiveness of foreign aid. He has visited our project in Ghana twice to track progress and agreed to be interviewed informally at a recent fundraising gathering for WomensTrust in New York.

Bill has long espoused that the paternalistic “we know what’s best for you” approach to international aid does not work, suggesting instead that aid be given to empower the recipients to construct a foundation on which they can build.

“Solutions to poverty are far more likely to come from people in Africa figuring out what they need rather than from those in the West trying to impose their answers,” Easterly said. “Modest efforts like WomensTrust, programs that seek homegrown solutions, are far more likely to yield meaningful reductions in poverty. The great thing about Dana’s project is, there can be only one World Bank, but there can be 100,000 WomensTrusts.”

While praise from the former World Bank economist is gratifying on its own, the results from which it stems – the changes taking place in Pokuase – offer tangible evidence that we are playing a significant role in aiding the community in its move to sustainability. And our model has the very real potential to be successfully replicated.



Matilda, a WT loan client selling her handmade batik fabric. Photo by Mark Tuschman, featured in *Capital of Hope*, a new book about WomensTrust.

Our mission is to empower women and girls in Pokuase, Ghana, through microenterprise, education, and healthcare, and to inspire others to do the same elsewhere.

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MICROLENDING

The WT staff in Pokuase celebrated 100-percent loan repayment for the last quarter, which is indicative of their growing capability to manage the microlending program and their incredible teamwork. This is an exceptional achievement at a time when inflation is high and economic pressures are mounting. Because we are a bottom-up organization, we benefit from a local team who can use our training and tools to adapt in a changing environment and work with clients who, for the most part, they already know.

This microlending success reflects our local reputation and credibility. Our clients are aware that we are committed to social good – they have watched us for six years partner with the community, build constituencies for change and bring in resources they would never be able to procure on their own. These include scholarships, healthcare, training, equipment and cash – thoughtfully applied to specific programs with measurable outcomes

EDUCATION

New Classrooms, New Attitude

The children of the Nii Otto Kwame Primary School in Pokuase had much to celebrate when they returned to school at the end of their summer break. Thanks to the construction of two new classrooms, they no longer have to worry about being part of the class that lost days because of rain.

The pilot project was made possible through \$20,000 in donations from WT supporters. The volunteer effort was led by an entrepreneurial contractor, Vahan Sarkisian from our New London community, who flew to Pokuase on his own nickel to lend his talents. He structured a contract with a local construction team led by Isaac Dodoo and Samuel Adjete, and the building was finished on time and within budget.



First Day of School at Nii Otto Kwame Primary



With this tangible sign of progress, in-town coalitions are now being formed to refurbish the existing four-room structure badly in need of repair. Believe me, it won't be a straight shot. But to see PTAs forming, former graduates who have succeeded sought out for contributions, and the middle school kids agreeing to paint inside and out, that's progress.

Computer Literacy

Donations also led to the purchase of ten new software-loaded laptops for computer-training classes that are now being organized in Pokuase. All schools in town are anxious to offer their students computer education, but we are the first to offer a program of this kind. It's a start, and we have found a teacher and a classroom. Needless to say, helping the town get organized to bring technology to the students of Pokuase is a vital key to breaking the cycle of poverty.

Isaac, Vahan, and Samuel with the building site in the background

17 Scholars See What Is Possible

WomensTrust could not have come so far without our volunteers. One brainstorming sensation is Steve Mecca, a college professor from Rhode Island who is now in Africa teaching at the University of Ghana. He personally organized a private tour for 17 middle school girls in our enrichment program, who had never been on a college campus.



WT Scholarship girls visit University of Ghana

They worked in advance to prepare questions as a group, convened at 7 a.m. and headed only 30 minutes away to the opening of a new world. The students toured the library and had an opportunity to meet with scholars and teachers. One of the participants told me later that it was the first time in her life that she had, “sat at a table, was asked what I wanted to eat from a menu and had it served to me.” The high point, though, was meeting and talking with a woman who had succeeded academically and professionally – a Ghanaian woman with a PhD in advanced science – for them, that transformed an impossible dream into a tangible goal.

INTERNS

WomensTrust is committed to providing student interns access to the workings of our program as well as the grinding reality of poverty in Africa. We benefit from their energy and insights and our team in Pokuase gets a window on the outside world. This summer we introduced a new twist: we had a student from Ghana overlap with an intern from the U.S. – our first global intern team.

Alhassan Abdulai, a senior at Ashesi University worked closely with the WT staff and played a role in devising new gradations of penalties for loan recipients. He never expected to participate in collections and reported back to career services at school that he could not have had a better learning experience. We are structuring an ongoing relationship with Ashesi, a private university patterned on the U.S. model.

Rohan Trivedi, a senior at Wesleyan University in Connecticut, led the installation and implementation of a new management information system. He was in Pokuase for two months and became a beloved member of the team. He made an indelible contribution. Here’s an excerpt from his report:

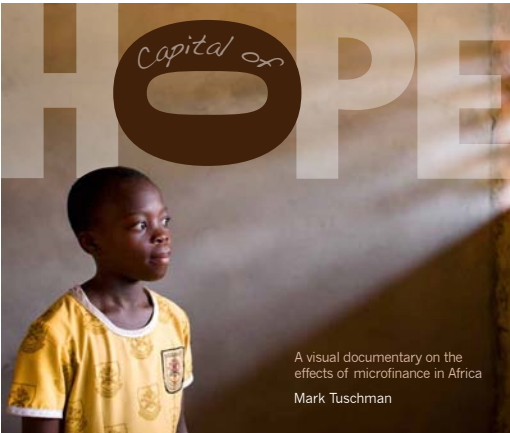
“I witnessed a paradigmatic shift towards long-term success. The reputation WomensTrust has gathered in the community is exceptional. It is a productive, efficient institution that has brought about visible progress in the Pokuase area. And, when you see the interactions between the staff and the clients they serve, you get the sense that this model really works.”



WT chief financial officer, Francis Osei works with summer intern, Rohan Trivedi

BRINGING POKUASE TO LIFE

You can now experience Pokuase for yourself in two new ways



Capital of Hope, by Mark Tuschman

Capital of Hope, a new book created by award winning photographer Mark Tuschman, portrays the backdrop of poverty in Pokuase, and the spirit of our clients and scholarship students who are the driving force for change. The book's images are so moving they received recognition by Nicholas Kristof, co-author of the new book *Half the Sky* and Pulitzer Prize winning op-ed columnist for the New York Times. It is available for purchase from blurb.com and is also available directly from the WT office in NH.

Also, stories from our microlending clients have been captured on film by Kai de Mello-Folsom, Chapman University student, WomensTrust intern and talented multidisciplinary artist. His short documentary makes Pokuase real – and brings to life how we partner with our marvelous clients. The film will soon be available for viewing on our web site.

In summary, WomensTrust is doing remarkably well. Recently we were invited to enter an online fundraising contest sponsored by Global Giving and finished second among 167 competitors, earning a permanent spot on their website (www.globalgiving.com).

Thank you for your ongoing support of this amazing venture. It would not be possible without you. I hope you feel that despite these difficult economic times we are living through, WomensTrust deserves your continuing commitment. Money in Africa goes a very long way and we are making a real difference.

Best Wishes

Dana Dakin
Founder WomensTrust



Kai de Mello-Folsom filming in Ghana with WT loan officer, Evans Gyamfi

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