WomensTrust
POKUASE VILLAGE

The Secret to Successful Aid according to the highly considered international development economist William Easterly

*…is that there is no secret. One approach to a successful aid project just is to immerse yourself in the local community, put local people in charge who are themselves highly motivated, be adaptive and flexible to respond to whatever the local people think about how they can help themselves, so that you customize the "standard project designs" to fit local circumstances. Most aid projects fail because there is nobody in the field making all these necessary adaptations and fixing unanticipated problems as they arise. The moral of the story is: be a Searcher and not a Planner. All of these generalities came to mind when I visited the project **WomensTrust** in Pokuase, Ghana yesterday, which I had also visited two years ago.*

To read the full blog and learn more about Bill Easterly, visit the WomensTrust homepage at www.womenstrust.org

This update gives a personal overview of our progress these last five years in Pokuase, a town of 22,000 in Ghana, on the outskirts of the country's capital Accra.

We picked a great country and are proud to report they just had a second very successful and peaceful transfer of presidential power. President Obama is visiting this July to celebrate Ghana as a model of democracy and to "reach out to our friends." Reaching out is what WomensTrust is about.

EntrepreneursClub member, Vida Zah, selling beverages at her shop.

Success begins with our microlending base. We put meaningful capital in the hands of entrepreneurial woman to stabilize their income stream and support their pursuit of new business options. Women immediately invest all profits to keep their children healthy and in school. With their guidance, we add skill building in the form of classes and counseling so our clients can go as far as

they can. Over our first five years, more than 1,000 loan recipients have had the opportunity to dramatically change their lives.

And we keep expanding the distance they can go. This last year, we instituted our Entrepreneurs Club for women who have the drive to take their businesses to a more sustainable level. Funded by a $10,000 grant from the UN African Mothers Association, twelve women qualified for larger loans to achieve objectives relative to their business plans, and they finished the cycle with 100-percent repayment. Ultimately, our goal is to help the strongest clients prove their credit worthiness so that they can get into the Ghana banking system. At the same time, and with your additional funding support, we continue to actively recruit less resourced women to bring them onto the continuum.

WT scholarship recipients hard at work in school.

Another focus for WomensTrust is keeping girls in school. Educating girls has been proven to be the single most effective investment for long-term social and economic change. Earning power goes up, birthrates come down, healthcare improves. Think what would have happened, if we had directed all those billions of international aid dollars into supporting girls' education.

But, scholarship money alone is not enough. Cultural traditions hold girls back from competing in school and attempting to access what limited opportunities are available. Many give up hope. We now have pilot programs that give them the ability to keep moving along their opportunity continuum, to aim high through their studies and to open up their options. As they succeed, they create local examples of the value of working hard and become the educated citizens needed to build their country's future. We have candidates ready and can confidently add 100 more exceptional girls to our program over the next two years.

Many of our most promising innovations have come from student interns and individual volunteers from the US. Through them, WomensTrust has begun to satisfy the other half of our mission: inspire others to follow and benefit from our lead.

We see a growing interest in wanting to make a difference in the world. Passionate young people – curious and feeling a deep link to Africa, as did I – are getting grants on their own and coming to Pokuase. They are using our relationships and immense credibility on the ground to become active members of our connected world.

Our first group of scholarship girls to graduate from high school.

Locally from New London, intern Sasha Chait (attending Clark University) secured treated malaria-preventing nets and distributed them side-by-side with the public nurse in Pokuase. Magbe Savane from Colby-Sawyer College instituted on her own, during her winter break, an exceptionally popular healthy living skills program there. This summer, she will use a grant from Howard University to do health-related research in Mali, then return to WomensTrust to help shape our healthcare support program her senior year.

Hannah Davis at NYU came to us through her grandfather – a Rotarian in Providence, Rhode Island, who will be teaching at the University of Ghana this fall term. Hannah took charge of our girls' enrichment training. She named the program, started the fundraising for it and hopes to lead the effort in Ghana upon her graduation. She brought another ally, Gemma Cooper-Novak, who implemented a powerful theater curriculum for primary and junior high students. While in Pokuase, she gained acceptance into a Master's program at Harvard.

WT intern Sasha Chait in Pokuase distributing malaria nets to children under five.

Desmond Ang secured a Lombard grant upon graduation from Dartmouth to work for six months with our team in Pokuase, becoming interim COO in the process. He did a great job and has just received word of a Fulbright Fellowship. Before he leaves, he's training our next intern who will get to Ghana to install a Management Information System (MIS) that was fully researched by a team of students back on the Dartmouth campus. Our new intern, currently attending Wesleyan, will partner this summer with an intern from Ashesi University in Ghana.

Dartmouth graduate and WT intern Desmond Ang with the Pokuase staff: Evans, Francis, Gertrude, and Eric.

So, the continuum of opportunity applies to those who contribute in Pokuase as well as to our women clients and girl scholars. It's all about credibility and relationships and building a network. Our board in Ghana now has local members as well as professionals from Accra. We are activating links to universities, US governmental agencies and other NGOs who are looking to sponsor projects at the local level. Our team will be able to work with these groups for grants to galvanize progress in Pokuase. Thus, we become a valuable bottom-up development hub.

In summing up, Bill Easterly continues in reference to WomensTrust:

> *This kind of aid project is based on a lot of personal, face to face interaction, developing trust and a shared vision, so it is small scale, it has to let things proceed at their own pace, it can't meet rigid preset output targets, it could never be judged by a rigorous "randomized controlled trial" methodology. In short, it involves the kind of tacit knowledge and individual adaptation that could never be converted into a routinized project implemented by the official aid bureaucracies. It breaks all the rules, and it works.*

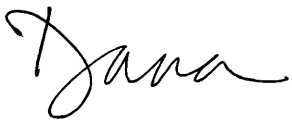
To our steady supporters: you made WomensTrust succeed. You asked to hear our stories and be witness to change. If it weren't for you, we would not have survived. I am hoping you can continue to contribute to our important ongoing programs at least at the level of your prior commitment, even though we recognize that demands on your funds are greater than ever.

To our broader New Hampshire constituency: you have kept the home hearth burning. Our community-based thrust is what gives WomensTrust its soul. We are looking for individuals and other key donors who are willing to extend their philanthropic commitment beyond our borders and venture onto this promising frontier.

To the institutional investment community: you provided the livelihood and experience for me to start this "return" phase of my life. I have been overwhelmed by your willingness to be early "investors." You have traveled to Ghana to gain experience first hand and have contributed in significant ways. Word is spreading. You bring an appreciation of the long-term investment value of a bottom-up approach and we hope you can help us expand our circle of investment philanthropists to take our highly replicable model to scale.

WomensTrust does not help the poor; rather, we empower the under-resourced to sustain their climb out of poverty. Our agenda is to share our knowledge and our access to resources – and keep coming back. Wouldn't it be wonderful to use this world-wide economic crisis, deeply affecting livelihoods in Africa, to reach out and step up our commitment to friends who are so ready to climb onto the "up escalator." Please be in touch. And thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



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