

COMPUTER LITERACY IN NORTHERN UGANDA

Davis Project for Peace Proposal Title: Computer Literacy in Northern Uganda

Project Leader: Mary Nono Akoko

Partnership Organization: Maarifasasa

Project Dates: May 1st, 2022, and July 20th, 2022

Location: Pader District, Northern Uganda

Affiliated Institution: Methodist University

Background Information

As a person born in Pader District located in Northern Uganda, I believe this region epitomizes the ideas of resilience like no other region in Uganda. Northern Uganda went through many years of insurgencies which led to several war-affected victims in the region. Although the people in the region strive relentlessly every day to achieve economic security, health and well-being, and social justice, more than one million people have been displaced because of the war between the Ugandan government and the armed group known as the Lord's Resistance Army. The LRA kidnapped tens of thousands of children and young people and forced them to work and fight. Rebel commanders pushed young girls to marry and bear children with them. Furthermore, 95% of the people in this region live in rural areas and depend on low-income subsistence agriculture. Despite this, a new narrative is developing from the region: one of quick development, perseverance, hard effort, and a never-ending desire for long-term peace. I believe a computer literacy project is a fantastic way to improve education in Northern Uganda.

The problem

Due to the extreme level of poverty in Northern Uganda, students graduate from high school without ever touching a computer. I know this from my own experience. We did not have any computers in my school. My father could not afford to buy a computer, and I was seventeen when I used one for the first time. I was applying to United World College, and the only place I could access a computer was through a local farming organization. The only reason I was allowed to use it was because my father knew some of the officers. After being accepted and while I was attending UWC, I noticed many other students my age was proficient using computers. This experience made me feel left behind and alienated. I struggled to catch up on computer skills and knowledge, and this made me realize how far behind other students back home are still isolated from the world of technology. After I learned how to use a computer, I knew one day I will contribute to my community and work to make sure students have access to computers. Computer Literacy in Northern Uganda is one of the lowest in the world. A few privately owned secondary schools teach basic computer lessons during which five to seven students share one computer. Unfortunately, the majority of parents cannot afford to send their children to those private schools.

Solution Proposal

I will expand the existing computer lab in Lagwai Seed Secondary School (L.S.S.S) in my homeland of Pader District. Currently the school, which has around 600 students, has four computers that only teachers can use. With the help of the funding, I will buy 20 computers to add on the 4 existing computers in the school, so one computer can be used by 4 students during class sessions in the computer lab. To address the problem of no Wi-Fi at the school. I contacted the local internet service provider MTN Uganda who will install a service route in the school. Mr. Robert Bob Okello, from Maarifasasa has assured me that he and his team will install computers and install design softwares such as Adobe suite (Photoshop, illustrator, InDesign, Premiere Pro), Type Master for practicing type, and Google Earth that can be used when there is no Wi-Fi at certain intervals.

The vision

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My vision is to use computer training as a catalyst of sustainable peace and development in Northern Uganda, by equipping the students with the skills they need to create and acquire jobs in their communities. Lagwai S.S.S will continue annually to enroll students who will benefit from having access to technology.

The Purpose and Impact

The purpose of the vision is to provide computer knowledge and skills such as programming, Microsoft tools and research skills etc. Access to computers in Lagwai S.S.S will encourage more students to attend school because it will improve the quality of education. According to the Ministry of Education & Sport, Lagwai S.S.S has the highest school dropouts in the entire Pader district. As a result, the students end up falling short of a standard goal that they are required to meet. My project aims to empower students and provide them technology that will enhance their computer skills for future careers. A study conducted by the Institute of Public Health and Management showed that out of 200 female students, 30% of them faced unintended teenage pregnancy. My project will provide access to technology which will expand teenage females' knowledge about birth controls and contribute towards reducing teenage pregnancies. We understand that the computer skills acquired from training and further access to computers will broaden their critical thinking abilities, increasing their access to information and open them to be aware of what is going on in the outside world. I believe this will impact the students to build skills and knowledge to broaden the career horizons of the students who have grown up in rural communities.

Sustainability

Firstly, we are building a computer Lab, the Lab will be locked, the keys will be kept in the Headteacher's office. To access the lab by a teacher, they will sign in and leave their IDs in the Headteacher's office. The head of the department will ensure that their computers are locked and safe. In addition to that, the school has security guards who will ensure the computers are safe and the school is also fenced. The secondary school is 2 kilometers away from the District Education office, District Headquarter, and the police station. The head of the computer department answers to the principal and the principal also answers to the District Education office. The District Education office (DEO) is informed, and the DEO has promised to monitor that the computers are used for the right purpose. And finally, I will sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the local government and the school outlining our partnership with them about safety and usage of the computers. Okello Robert Bob is the CEO of Maarifasasa, a UWC alumni founded education technology startup in Uganda that facilitates access to life changing learning opportunities in a fast-changing technological era. They will be the technology support partner and will avail a custom designed digital literacy curriculum and content alongside a pool of qualified trainers with a track record in digital skills training with Google partners. Our partner Maarifasasa has agreed to do repairs and serve as a third party in doing regular checking on the computers.

Plan of Action: Project Timeline

The Project will run from March to July when the computer lab will be opened for use.