

A Health-Based Approach for Peacebuilding in Northwestern Rwanda

Project Site: Rwanda

Sponsoring College: Dartmouth College

Designated Project Leader: Sydney Kamen, United States, Dartmouth College

This project recognizes and makes central the role of women in peacebuilding and conflict mitigation, and aims to empower marginalized women and at-risk girls from historically conflicting ethnic groups in northwestern Rwanda through the promotion of menstrual hygiene management (MHM) and social entrepreneurship. In the summer of 2019, with the support of the Davis Projects for Peace, we will organize four cycles of the proposed program, training an estimated 120 participants. The committee should note that this proposal has already secured an additional \$9,200.00 worth of in-kind donations from locally-operating community-based and non- governmental organizations.

Problem Statement

Almost a quarter-century after the Rwandan Genocide, dangerous tensions persist between the historical Hutu and Twa ethnic groups in the northwest Musanze District, hindering development in the region and producing unequal sharing of resources. In 2015, a World Bank assessment reported the Musanze district as being afflicted by the most extreme poverty in the country. The evaluation cites "inadequate access to health care," "environmental degradation," and "intercommunity conflict" as major contributing factors. The Bank explicitly identifies the empowerment of women as a key mechanism for restoring regional stability.

Objectives and Impact

This program unites women of divergent communities around an issue that impacts women indiscriminately. Each cohort will be composed of 30 women, 15 from each historically marginalized ethnic group - Hutu and Twa - in northwestern Rwanda.

Improved health: Workshops will be taught by local healthcare workers and professionals who are trained to deliver a comprehensive curriculum on sexual and reproductive health as well as menstrual hygiene management. These workshops will expose participants to an array of topics including family planning options and HIV/AIDS prevention. With limited access to sanitary pads, most women and girls turn to old rags, used clothing, ash or paper to manage menstruation. This project responds to the community's need for a more sanitary alternative.

Improved access to education and empowerment: Education is vital to the peace, prosperity, and security of our world; we cannot achieve this vision while a large portion of our population is structurally excluded due to center-periphery dynamics, gender relations and ethnic tension residues from the genocide. An intergenerational mentorship program is a unique component of this initiative. Workshop participants will have an opportunity to participate in additional professionally-facilitated training as a pathway to serve in their rural communities as "MHM mamas" for at-risk girls who lack local healthcare services or in-school health education. With access to MHM education and resources, girls miss fewer days of school per year and are more likely to delay marriage and have, on average, 2.2 fewer children. Smaller family size reduces strain on community and environmental resources. Once a month, most women in the rural areas of Musanze turn to old rags, used clothing, ash or paper to manage menstruation. Roughly 270,000 girls in rural Rwanda miss an average of four days of school per month due to a lack of sanitary products. Every girl deserves the right to pursue an education, but without safe and effective sanitary protection, it is not possible for girls to comfortably leave their homes, let alone attend school.

Economic empowerment: The sales of artisanal sanitary pads will catalyze economic opportunities for vulnerable women. Through this social entrepreneurship venture, women can cultivate relationships with other local businesses and artisans to source required materials for future ventures.

Environmental conservation: This program recognizes the links between environmental degradation and regional conflict. Thus, all resources and materials used in the construction of sanitary pads will be locally sourced to reduce the carbon footprint from transport. Moreover, one of the primary materials used in manufacture is derived from an invasive species plaguing the Great Lakes region. Water hyacinth is a destructive and invasive aquatic species in Rwanda that obstructs water-based transportation, inhibits fishing, decreases access to fresh water, threatens biodiversity through the depletion of oxygen in water and kills native species. The water hyacinth, native to South America, is also a known breeding ground for mosquitoes and parasites, increasing spread of diseases like malaria, zika virus, and schistosomiasis. PFC has an ongoing initiative working with communities to remove water hyacinth from the local Cyuve and Mukungwa Rivers. Water hyacinth fibers have been successfully used as a sorbent in sanitary pads in similar regional programs, and have been positively received by communities, with no detected health

risks. These fibers will be combined with locally sourced cotton as the sorbent for this initiative. The use of water hyacinth will not only reduce waste and protect the local fisheries and fishing industry, but also stimulate the local economy. This scourge of Lake Kivu can be recast as sanitary pads to help girls receive the education they need to escape poverty.

Community capacity building and reconciliation: The program features two peacebuilding sessions, one at the beginning and end of the workshop (see addendum). Sessions will teach conflict management and resolution skills through the lens of entrepreneurship. Lessons will include how to: build business partnerships, manage and work within cooperatives; allocation of labor and cooperative work; and communication skills to address, mitigate and solve conflict in the workplace.

Background

Sydney Kamen is a Junior at Dartmouth College studying geography, sociology, and global health. She is also the founder and president of SOAP (c. 2012), a nonprofit that saves lives by improving sanitation and curbing the spread of disease through targeted public health and entrepreneurship initiatives in partnership with under-resourced communities around the world. SOAP and PFC have helped over 200 women form a federally recognized women's cooperative that supports the economic opportunities of historically marginalized women and widows, and which has now recycled more than 15,000 bars of soap for resale in Musanze, Rwanda. All contributing parties to this proposed program share a vision. Sydney is well-prepared to drive this initiative having spent significant time in country and possessing an advanced proficiency in Swahili. Sydney has arranged to return to monitor and follow-up on projects while staying with her former host family in Musanze, thereby limiting personal costs. Through MHM education and reusable sanitary pad construction education, this project aims to organize around local talent and assemble local skill to promote community-level peacebuilding, tolerance and stability.

Sustainability

All resources used in the construction of sanitary pads will be locally sourced, recycled and repurposed products. All workshops instructors and educators are Rwandan, many coming from the Northwest region, near the target district of Musanze. The sustained impact of the workshops will include the "MHM mamas" mentorship program, with a special component of seed funding dedicated to funding this initiative in mentors' villages. Program participants will be ensured placement in one of three cooperatives in the area, one of which is the SOAP-PFC organized cooperative, where they will have an opportunity to sell their sanitary pads alongside other artisanal products such as soaps and woven baskets.

Timeline

<p>Development January – June 2019</p> <p>Draft curriculum for workshop with instructors and educators</p> <p>Finalize dates, arrange logistics, and reserve spaces</p> <p>Advertise workshop through local media, NGOs, CBOs, and other community resources</p> <p>Identify target communities, select beneficiaries, and assign participants to specific cohorts</p>
<p>Program Implementation June – August 2019</p> <p>Four cycles of 8-day intensive MHM and social entrepreneurship workshops in Musanze, Rwanda</p>
<p>Sustained Impact August 2019 onwards</p> <p>Establishment of intergenerational MHM mentorship program that targets at-risk and vulnerable girls in rural communities</p> <p>Market access to sell sanitary pads in one of three pre-established women's cooperatives</p> <p>Refresher and advanced training workshops</p>

Conceptual Program Overview

