

Gambia: Marie Bennett's Skill training centre

In the end it is all about giving young people a chance to learn skills so that they can earn a living for themselves. This is what the Marie Bennett's Skill Centre in Gambia is doing.

Hundreds of youths in The Gambia leave school without a diploma, due to pregnancy, lack of funds etc. They are without employment, and there are virtually no affordable skill training centres available for youths or women.

Literacy rate is now on the increase especially among the youthful population. Government has introduced free education for girls, so as to encourage parents to send their daughters to school. This has been very successful as it also addresses the problem of early marriage, teenage pregnancy and other related problems. However, unemployment among youths remains a major problem in The Gambia, whose unemployment rate stands at 70%.

Most of the school dropouts find it difficult to acquire skills because the vocational centres are either too expensive or too far away so one has to meet the cost of transportation daily which, is not affordable to many. The skill centre in this project charges lower fees compared to regular education and private skills centres because there is a sustainability aspect built in. The products and services out of the training, like school uniforms, composed and printed documents like brochures and newsletters will be sold to external customers. At the end of the training students are prepared to have self-employment in high marketable skills. Through micro enterprise support credits students are enabled to establish their own workshop for income and employment generation. The skill centre is also accessible for illiterate youth.

Net4kids' partners for this project are Better Future and Kombo North Program Area ('Sinchu Baliya Program Site'). This project is contracted and monitored by Wilde Ganzen.



Expanding and improving the existing skill centre

Kombo North Program Area, affiliated to Christian Children's Fund (CCF) the Gambia, planned to expand the existing skill centre with new courses and more classes so that even more youths can benefit from the centre.

In addition to the current courses there are plans for expansion and the inclusion of courses like cookery, metal work and wood works. This expansion is envisaged because of the growing demand of the services offered by the Skill Centre as well as the impact of these courses on the lives of the beneficiaries. For this expansion to take place we need support in the areas of equipment and teachers. Theoretical courses on metal and wood, as well as demonstrations of basic techniques will take place in the skill centre. The practical aspect will be done in the community workshops under supervision of the teacher. The skill centre will provide the materials for the practical training.

For the typing and microcomputer application there is a need for additional

teaching aids like computers and textbooks.

The sewing section will not only target the drop-outs but also those poor girls who were not privileged to attend school and are now married. This will help them to become responsible wives and thereby asserting some degree of influence in making decision in the household. Therefore we need more sewing machines and embroidery materials.

Next to the activities at the skill centre itself the Program Area intends to support graduating students in setting up community tailoring, carpentry or metal workshops as a resettlement package, in the form of a revolving loan.

Objective

The aim of this skill centre is "Educate youths to become useful citizens with different professions" and thereby "Improving the socio-economic status of children and their families with a view to enhancing self reliance and empowerment thereby alleviating child poverty". To achieve this goal the project on expanding the centre is started. The goal of this project is to improve on the access and quality of education offered at Marie Bennett's skill Centre.

The values they apply are:

- We believe in the empowerment of the people as a pre- requisite for development.
- Equality of all people and to be poor doesn't make you a lesser person. We seek to provide equal opportunity to all those in needs regardless of their ethnic, social, religious or other background.

By offering about 150 deprived students a skills training, they have the opportunity to

generate income for themselves and their family.



How to help

The total amount of funds needed is € 27.517. Check out the various help options by clicking the how to help button.

Project activities

Cookery

- Hire a cookery teacher
- Purchase cookery equipment
- Purchase refrigerator

Number of children that benefit: 20 each year

Metal workshop

- Hire a technical teacher
- Purchase of welding materials
- Contracting community workshops for practical training
- Support of graduated students in setting up their own business

Number of children that benefit: 15 each year

Wood workshop

- Hire a technical teacher

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- Purchase of carpentry materials
- Contracting community workshops for practical training
- Support of graduated students in setting up their own business

Number of children that benefit: 50 each year

Expansion of Sewing section

- Purchase of sewing machines and broderie materials
- Support of graduated students in setting up their own tailoring shop

Number of children that benefit: 75 each year

In total about 160 children will benefit of the Skill Center each year.

Where do we stand now?

At this moment the centre offers the following courses:

- Typing and Micro Computer Application
- Sewing, Embroidery and Tie and Dye
- English Language and Office Practice
- Book Keeping and Business Studies

The vocational centre has been operational and serving its purpose of addressing the issue of dropouts since 1995. The centre started with two classrooms. The students graduated every two years. In 2004 the center has moved to its permanent location; a building with four classrooms. One of the classrooms is used as a computer lab, one for sewing, one for typing and the other one for lectures. A classroom can accommodate up to 45 students.

Next to the current courses the centre

provide training on Sexual and Reproductive Health, Tobacco and HIV/ AIDS in collaboration with other partners.

Postcard from... The story of Fatoumata Touray

I am Fatoumata Touray.

I was born in 1983 at Wellingara. I am a Muslim by religion and a Mandinka by tribe. It was at Sinchu Baliya that I did my primary education. I then joined the Marie Bennetts Skill Centre to pursue a two year Certificate Course in sewing. It has made me to belief that through these projects life has been made easier for many children as result of their contribution towards their welfare. It is abundantly clear that this successful journey began from humble beginning and through dedication, hard work and high sense of commitment of the sponsors, staff and the community in which they serve and to the entire Gambian nation.

I am presently working as a sewing teacher at the Marie Bennetts Skill Centre since 2003. Before this appointment I benefited from a resettlement package, which included a sewing machine and other materials from the Sinchu Baliya Family Helper Project. This package has helped me to establish my own business and create earning for my family and myself. I still offer private services to earn myself few dalasis extra despite my present employment.

About the organisation The Netherlands

Better Future is a Dutch company, focusing on leadership programs, on social entrepreneurship within Dutch companies and on sustainable development from an economic perspective within local (African) communities. Within the framework of this

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project, Better Future will be the linking pin between Net4Kids and the local development professionals, other organisations involved and the target group of the project. The starting point for Better Future is always that the local needs and initiatives are leading and that solutions are sustainable and developed and implemented in cooperation with the local communities. For Better Future it is important to enable others to help themselves. The objective is the expansion of local initiatives and investing in business skills from an entrepreneurial development vision.

Gambia

Sinchu Baliya Program Site is an emerging civil society organization serving 9 communities and registered as a community-based organization. It currently has an enrolment of 560 of which 415 are sponsored within the CCF Sponsorship Program. The community-based organization has been involved in development work for almost two decades at grassroots level with parents of the enrolled children serving as the Managers of the affairs through parents Management Committee and the assistant of hired and volunteering staff. It is a non-profit, voluntary, and a non-political organization that does not discriminate on the basis of religion, sex or whatsoever.

The Sinchu Baliya program site is affiliated to the Christian Children Fund Inc The Gambia since 1984. It's one of the leading child welfare agencies in the Gambia with their headquarters in Kanifing they are a charitable organization that has registered as a non-governmental institution and provides services to children through community-based organizations like ours. The Program Site is also under the newly established Area Partnership Programming APP where four projects are grouped together to form a Program Area, which is called Kombo North Program Area. Sinchu Baliya Program Site is

one of those four projects.

We also work with other development actors as partners through the CCF National Office such as the UNDP, UNICEF, British High Commission, American Embassy, The Government of the Gambia and other local Non-governmental organizations in our areas.

Better Future has cooperated in the past at many moments and ways with CCF The Gambia (Christian Children's Fund). Project managers of CCF The Gambia have participated in leadership programmes. Better Future has evaluated the strategic planning process of the program areas of CCF The Gambia. For the skill centre Better Future will support the local organization in building a sustainable skill centre and will monitor the project for the donors and Net4Kids.

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