



WOMENSTRUST
POKUASE VILLAGE

Background

In 2003, to mark her 60th birthday and the beginning of the “give-back” stage of life, Dana Dakin traveled to Ghana, West Africa, with the express purpose of launching a microfinance program for women. From the perspective of 35 successful years as an entrepreneur servicing the investment field, microlending made sense as the most promising way to bring about real change. By providing access to capital directly to poor women, they could fuel the drive toward their own economic well-being as well as that of their families. The choice of Africa was the culmination of a college thesis on Pan-Africanism and a lifelong interest in the continent.

Today, WomensTrust is a 501(c)(3) organization showing five years of success. With microfinance at the heart of its activities, and the essential additional components of education and healthcare integrated into the program, WomensTrust is a model to bring resources and community-based support directly to the developing world.

What is microfinance?

At the core of WomensTrust is microfinance, which has been called “the most effective tool to fight poverty ever invented.” Put on the map by Muhammad Yunus, founder of the Grameen Bank and winner of the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize, microfinance is now widely embraced as a powerful method for helping people climb out of poverty.

WomensTrust has over 1,000 loan clients – all women who own local businesses, with many struggling to make \$2 per day. We ask them to form small groups in order to apply for individual loans. Each member of a group is responsible for repaying her own loan in addition to making sure the others do the same. Eligibility for the next, higher round of loans is based solely on timely and full repayment by their group.

Here is how the women use their loans. Most of our clients make their living in the informal economy as hairdressers, bakers, seamstresses, and “petty” traders, selling goods from tables and tiny kiosks or carrying them from place to place. With WomensTrust capital, they are able to increase or diversify their inventories. They can buy in bulk, decreasing their time away from work traveling to buy supplies. Profits accrued are immediately invested in better nutrition, healthcare, and education for themselves and their children.

Why go beyond microfinance?

WomensTrust believes that the climb out of poverty cannot be sustained by access to credit alone. In our model, the key to long-term economic growth is to integrate supplementary programs of education and healthcare. We focus on one geographic setting – Pokuase – and deepen our relationships so that we can bring additional support and resources in line with true interest and demand.

Educating Girls — Research clearly shows that when girls are educated, all quality-of-life indicators improve. They have smaller families, longer and healthier lives, and more stable economic paths. In Pokuase fewer than 50 percent of girls finish junior high. They are routinely taken out of school to do chores and support their families. WomensTrust has instituted a scholarship program in local public schools for Pokuase’s brightest girl students. We also have an enrichment component that allows the most gifted to visualize a future beyond the limited traditional paths of their mothers. When our scholarship candidates learn that based on results they are guaranteed an education through senior secondary school, they begin to see options. They do indeed become the hope for long-term change.

Business Training — At the request of our loan clients – 66 percent of whom have had very limited access to school and sign their names with a thumbprint – WomensTrust offers classes that teach how to improve their bottom line. We help them build on their basic business instinct, and move forward toward new opportunities as well as the employment of others. By creating a continuum of next steps and the training to be successful, we see the women of Pokuase driving forward the economic health of the community.

Healthcare Partnering — Healthy mothers are essential to a healthy economy, and WomensTrust has focused on ways to improve the five-percent mortality rate from pregnancy-related causes each year. By partnering with Pokuase’s very able public nurse, committed volunteer healthcare professionals and medical students have conducted screenings for factors that negatively impact maternal health: hypertension, anemia, and diabetes. Also, for all microlending clients in good standing we have a donor-funded program that gets them into Ghana’s new national health insurance plan.

Importance of Donors

All of our accomplishments are possible because of the steady vision and commitment of our donors. What we have designed and implemented through WomensTrust has produced tangible results in just five short years. It is a way toward positive news in Africa.

People in Pokuase have watched us continue to come back, to do what we say we're going to do, to ask and then innovate. We have built relationships and credibility throughout the town. There's evidence of the economy getting stronger, the educational level going higher, and health improving. All three work in tandem.

Our donors have created the opportunity for Pokuase to climb out of poverty -- bottom up, no layers, very efficient. This is in stark contrast to top-down programs that rarely reach the ground. We have results to believe in. We invite you to learn more and become part of our success.

Please contact:

WomensTrust, Inc
PO Box 15
Wilmot Flat, NH 03287

www.womenstrust.org
603-526-4366
info@womenstrust.org