



Empowering Development Alternatives

Project Proposal

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Executive Summary

Empowering Development Alternatives (EDA) is a 501(c)3 certified non-profit based in New York that was established with the goal of addressing the root causes of poverty in rural Uganda. Specifically, we provide impoverished but promising adolescents with the chance to complete an education in order to break the cycle of poverty and empower individuals to shape their own futures and the growth of their communities.

The region of Uganda in which we work, Jinja, has an extremely high number of children who have been orphaned by the AIDS epidemic. Though the government of Uganda offers free primary education, the vast majority of orphans will not be able to afford the cost of entering and completing secondary school, which will severely limit their chances for a productive future. Those students who can afford to attend secondary school will have to contend with a scarcity of educational resources. As higher education benefits both individuals and the communities into which they invest their skills, it is one of the most important avenues to finding long-term solutions to the problems of poverty.

Our project, **Leaders of the Future**, will allow students who have been orphaned because of their parents' HIV infection to complete secondary school and university and enter the workforce. Project objectives include financially sponsoring 25-100 dedicated and accomplished students who cannot afford secondary school; ensuring sponsored students have access to regular physical and psychological care; providing the secondary school, Cardinal Nsubuga, with the materials and facilities necessary for a high quality education; and linking our students with regional career opportunities to that will allow them to reinvest in the impoverished communities in which they grew up. Achieving these objectives and eventually expanding the scope of our project will enable an increasingly large number of young people to positively influence the development of Uganda.

The results we expect from this project include an increase in the number of orphans from Jinja who can enroll in and complete secondary school and university; an increase in the amount of educational resources in the rural school, leading to a higher performance on national exams and an increased rate of university acceptances; and an increase in the number of job opportunities for our students.

Background

As a result of the AIDS epidemic in Uganda, there has been a surge in the number of orphans. The Jinja Municipality alone reports that there are currently over 5000 orphaned children, in most cases due to losing one or both parents to AIDS-related illnesses¹. Historically, government programs aimed towards helping HIV orphans have been weak. However, in the last decade there have been positive attempts to address the socioeconomic impact AIDS has on children. Recently Uganda launched a no-cost HIV testing campaign aimed at children born to parents living with HIV/AIDS and those orphaned by the disease. This program has enabled thousands of children to be tested. Furthermore, in 1997, in an effort to achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE) within Uganda, the government removed school fees for up to four children per family. By 2001, student enrollment in primary school had increased to 7 million².

This success was not without serious repercussions, as government efforts have not been implemented to cope with the massive expansion in student numbers. The student-teacher ratio has jumped as high as 145:1 in crowded urban schools. Furthermore, random sampling of tests at the national level shows a decline in scores. The number of students who achieved a passing grade in mathematics dropped from 48% in 1996 to 31% in 1999, and from 92% to 56% on the English oral test. The increase in repetition and dropout rates throughout the education system in Uganda is equally concerning. Recent data shows drop out rates are above 50% and repetition rates are at 20%^{3,4}.

Even students who do successfully complete primary school often cannot continue in their pursuit of education. This is an especially striking problem for orphans, as only 20% attend secondary school⁵. Money is the limiting factor for most of these children when it comes to secondary school education, as the tuition, fees, and room and board costs can be prohibitively expensive. For an orphaned child whose remaining family is impoverished and struggling to provide basic necessities such as food, shelter, and medicine, education becomes a relative luxury that is overlooked. In the long term, this creates a cycle of poverty that is difficult for the community to break.

The quality of education in rural Uganda creates an additional barrier to student success. A dearth of resources such as textbooks, libraries, science equipment, and computers hinders intellectual growth. Proficiency in science subjects is especially hurt by these shortcomings. In 2011, over half of the students who took the national exam for the Uganda Certificate of Education failed in biology and chemistry, with performances in the arts and humanities much higher. This trend has been attributed to a lack of laboratory equipment and practical experience, which weakens both theoretical and applied knowledge⁶. Students' attitudes toward careers in science are also negatively influenced by the lack of laboratory facilities⁷. A poor quality of secondary education, especially in areas of science and technology, prevents young people from gaining the skills and knowledge necessary to enter the workforce and compete in an increasingly globalized economy.

Investing in education yields long-term, regenerative returns that have wide-reaching effects because higher education benefits the individual as well as the entire country. Individuals with a degree have a higher earned income, due to increased job opportunities and better knowledge of cutting edge technologies and skills. Individuals who have completed their education are also more involved and active in the civic and political spheres of their local and national governments, are less likely to commit crimes and spend time incarcerated, and have better health outcomes for themselves and their families⁸. As these are crucial factors necessary for maintaining a successful community, education is one of the most important venues for investing resources to combat economic and social problems. Therefore, our goal is to improve access to and quality of secondary education, especially in areas of science and technology.

1. Jinja Municipality Council
2. The World Bank: Education Notes on Uganda, 2002
3. World Bank, 2009
4. Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2011
5. UNICEF, 2010
6. UNEB 2012. Press briefing on the UCE results for 2011
7. UNCST 2007. Report of the Survey of Attitudes of Secondary Students' to science.
8. Contributions of Higher Education Investments to Development and Implications for African Higher Education, The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture, 2010

Project Goals

There are three core needs that must be fulfilled in order for education to be an effective tool for combating poverty. The first is access to higher learning. The second is ensuring a high quality of education. The third is a return of graduates to the community, directing knowledge and skills toward initiatives that improve the economy and infrastructure of impoverished regions. The goal of our project, **Leaders of the Future**, is to address and meet each of these needs.

Increasing access to education

The first initiative of the project is focused on access to education. The goal is to allow orphans to enter and complete secondary school. Financial support is provided to promising students who could not otherwise afford the tuition and fees. Healthcare and mental health services are provided to ensure regular attendance and completion of school, and overall well-being of our students. We strive to be deeply involved in the academic and personal growth and progress of each of our students.

Improving the quality of science and technology education

The goal of our second initiative is increasing the amount and quality of educational resources in our partner school. Cardinal Nsubuga cannot afford many of the facilities that more affluent high schools take for granted, such as a computer lab and a science lab. In their absence, students graduate without a practical understanding of science and technology. Filling this gap in secondary school education is absolutely necessary for improving the success of our students in a university setting and on the job market. We will supply material and equipment for the creation of a science lab and a computer lab, and provide training to teachers and students on the use and effective integration of these materials into the curriculum.

Reinvestment of the benefits of education

The goal of our third initiative is ensuring that students complete a university degree and give back to their communities, contributing to the long-term sustainability of our work. This local reinvestment can be accomplished through mentoring young students, motivating children to stay in school and apply for scholarships, or establishing careers in fields that will drive economic and social development of the region, such as social entrepreneurship, infrastructure development, engineering and technology, research, or medicine. In this way, an initial investment can provide the tools for long lasting change.

Methods

Access to education

Currently, EDA is financially supporting 20 students who applied for merit- and need-based full scholarships for secondary school in Jinja. This includes the cost of tuition, room and board, fees, and textbooks. They could not afford to attend secondary school because they were living in impoverished households, mostly due to the death of one or both parents to HIV/AIDS. In addition to the cost of education, we cover medical and psychological care. EDA is partnered with a local medical clinic, Nyenga HIV Mobile Clinic, which provides low-cost HIV testing, anti-retroviral treatment for our students with HIV, and general healthcare for all students. We have also partnered with a local psychologist, Dr. Fulgens Katende, who has experience working with vulnerable children within eastern Africa and understands the cultural dynamics that have shaped these children's psyches. He meets with students once a month in both group and individual therapy sessions, and has periodic meetings with family members.

Quality of education

To achieve the goal of improving the quality of science and technology education at Cardinal Nsubuga Secondary School, EDA will donate equipment for the creation of a computer lab and a science lab, and then provide training in the use of these resources. We have already supplied the school with several laptops, and provided initial training to students and teachers. In addition, we purchase refurbished laptops and collect donations of used science lab equipment from high schools and universities in NY. With these materials, Cardinal Nsubuga is furnishing a computer lab and a science lab to complement the science curriculum. EDA's associate coordinators create student lab manuals with instructions for low-cost experiments and demonstrations using the science equipment and reagents, and catalogs of the arriving laboratory equipment. The director and associate coordinators provide hands-on training with the new equipment during our visits to the school.

Reinvestment

Student financial support continues through their years in university. We will arrange periodic trips for them to return to their hometowns, encouraging continual investment in local communities. These visits can be a time for our students to mentor or tutor younger students, teach a skill they have learned to the residents, or promote and encourage higher education. We network and coordinate with local professionals and entrepreneurs whose careers reflect a commitment to finding sustainable solutions for regional problems. Through these connections, we can arrange opportunities for students to explore various fields and ideas in preparation for their graduation and entry into the workforce. This emphasis on giving back to the community is the driving force behind the long-term success of the project.

Anticipated outcomes and evaluation

Access to education

Our financial support will increase the numbers of vulnerable children who are able to finish secondary school and university with high grades and practical skills. This result will be evaluated by reviewing academic performance and progress, graduation rates, and acceptance rates into university. Quarterly reviews of students' progress during the semester will be undertaken in collaboration with the school's teachers and principal. Improved access to physical and psychological care will be measured by attendance records, the number of students with chronic or acute illnesses who receive treatment, and conferences with the school psychologist.

Quality of education

The supply of educational materials will allow for the establishment of a computer lab and a science lab at Cardinal Nsubuga. This will be evaluated by recording the amount of material that is provided to the school. We will track the number of laptops, and the amount and category of science lab equipment. We will ensure the material is being used effectively during visits to the school, and in between visits by regular communication with the teachers and the students. The integration of these facilities into the curriculum will be assessed by surveying students and teachers about frequency of use and whether assignments and exams make use of the facilities. We anticipate improved performance in and enthusiasm for science and technology subjects. We will evaluate improvements in performance on homework assignments and exams, and increased interest in science subjects and science based careers.

Reinvestment

By providing students with access to education, and ensuring the high quality of that education, we anticipate a high rate of acceptance into and completion of university. We will track our students' performances throughout their time in college, and monitor graduation rates. Our networking with local entrepreneurial ventures will give us the opportunity to link students with these regional initiatives and encourage them to use their education to work toward creative solutions for problems of poverty and development. We will track the number of graduates who direct their education toward endeavors that have long-term benefits for the country.

Organizational Information

Empowering Development Alternatives (EDA) is a New York based non-profit working in Jinja, Uganda. EDA was founded by V. Bonnie Nezaj in 2007 after she traveled to East Africa to see what actions grassroots organizations were taking to combat poverty in rural Uganda. Bonnie was dedicated to working on the ground, in direct coordination with the individuals in need. EDA became a 501(c)3 corporation in January 2010, when the current project, **Leaders of the Future**, began. This project is driven by the idea that investing in education is the most sustainable approach to addressing the root causes of poverty. By providing access to quality education, Leaders of the Future is enabling orphans and vulnerable children to complete school, to enter the workforce, and to effect positive changes within their communities.

Our organization is uniquely suited to accomplish this goal because we have an extensive network on the ground in Jinja, Uganda, and remain active in our students' individual progress and educational trajectory. Our support does not end with graduation from secondary school; it continues throughout our students' years in university, their entry into the workforce, and the rest of their lives. Our approach is conceived and carried out with the support of the community in which we work. This close association with the people we want to help allows our strategies to be effective and sustainable. Our team is divided between Jinja, Uganda, and the United States. In Jinja, our project coordinator is the principal of Cardinal Nsubuga Secondary School, Ritah Nassza. Our team psychologist is Fulgens Katende, who provides regular mental health counseling to our students. In addition, we are partnered with the Nyenga Mobile HIV Clinic, headed by Dr. Isaac Kyazze, where our students receive low-cost medical care. In the United States, EDA is directed by Bonnie Nezaj. Working with Bonnie are two associate coordinators, volunteer interns, and the board of directors.

The first two years of this project have been very successful, both in terms of student enrollment and achievement, and in terms of ensuring that our strategy and methodology is effective and can be scaled up. The 20 students initially selected for full scholarships in our program have entered Cardinal Nsubuga Secondary School, and all of them now board there. Living at the school full time gives them respite from what is often an unstable and unhealthy family environment, and allows more time to focus on schoolwork. Our students have been maintaining or improving their grades and receiving consistent health care. One of our older students has graduated and is now enrolled in college courses. These positive results from the first cohort of students validates the effectiveness of our approach, which we now wish to expand to include more students and provide more educational resources.

Sustainability

In the future, we will expand the scope of our project. We want to continue to increase the number of students served in order to reach a larger group of vulnerable children within Uganda. To finance this increase, we are actively applying for grants, building a steady donor base within New York through personal contacts and social media, and holding fundraisers several times a year. We are coordinating with high schools and universities within the tri-state area, and have been collecting donations of used textbooks and lab equipment to send to our partner secondary school. During our trips to Uganda, we have been building a network of local entrepreneurs and professionals that we can coordinate with in the future to assist graduates in their entry into the work force.