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The Shared Societies Project:
Leadership for Dialogue, Diversity and Social Cohesion

Building a world safe for difference

Replicable example of practice

Commitment V

Take steps to deal with economic disadvantages faced by sections of society who are discriminated against, and ensure equal access to opportunities and resources.

Suggested Approach:

Introduce affirmative action schemes to ensure that individuals from groups disadvantaged as a result of discrimination develop the capacities and confidence, and are encouraged, to take advantage of opportunities to initiate business opportunities

Gone Rural, Swaziland a Fair Trade Organization

Country: Swaziland

Background

- In 2006 the unemployment rate in Swaziland was estimated at 40% with 69% of the population believed to rank below the poverty line.
- 1 in 4 of adult Swazi people is estimated to be living with HIV or AIDS.
- The HIV and AIDS epidemic in Swaziland is believed to be the primary contributing factor to the drop in life expectancy. Currently life expectancy in Swaziland is estimated at 32 years (lowest in the world).
- The Gone Rural project, in Swaziland, aims to support women in rural communities that have been ravaged by poverty and HIV/AIDS.

Goals

- To provide the women in rural Swaziland with income generating opportunities.
- To create a viable business this is profitable while remaining socially responsible.
- To make goods for which there is a market using local materials and knowledge.
- Work with local communities to create goods which are based on local materials and local craft skills, but which meet the demand of modern living.

Method

- The company, Gone Rural, is a socially responsible business enterprise. It was set up as a for profit company with a strong social responsibility ethos.
- Gone Rural identifies as part of their work team interested women in rural communities where income-generating opportunities are few.
- The women first harvest the grass, a basic raw material, used in the majority of Gone Rural's goods.
- The grass is then taken to the Gone Rural headquarters where it is dyed.
- The dyed grass is then returned to the women who will make the articles for sale.
- Gone Rural staff go to each village on a pre-identified day and provide the women with raw material for future articles and buys articles that the women have already made.
- Teams of designers who work at the Gone Rural headquarters design the articles.
- The designers test different designs and once satisfied that their designs are marketable; they conduct trainings in the villages where the women who make the articles live.
- Gone Rural carries out constant quality assurance and increases the training time when the designers feel the product does not meet the quality requirements.
- Once trained, women return to their homesteads and create the items.
- The goods bought from the women are then sold at the Gone Rural shops.

Impact

- Women, often heads of household, are able to earn an income that would otherwise be impossible.
- Through its non-profit branch the project supports community initiatives aiming at further empower women, builds educational structures and creates a sustainable basis for progress.
- Thus far, this project has benefitted 700 women in rural areas of Swaziland.

Enabling conditions

- Gone Rural was aware of the type of goods/skills that were available locally.
- Gone Rural was aware that the raw materials were readily available.
- Gone Rural was able to identify women interested in making the products.
- Gone Rural was able to identify designers willing and able to work on the design of products based on local Swazi materials.
- Gone Rural has been able to sell the products created and make a profit, which has in turn allowed for expansion.
- The security of Gone Rural's staff has been threatened during market day (when they go to villages to buy goods), but by and large they have found ways to secure their own safety.

References/contacts for farther information

- Swaziland CIA world factbook page
  https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/wz.html
- For HIV statistics see http://www.avert.org/aids-swaziland.htm
- http://www.goneruralswazi.com
  Submitted by Ananda Millard