WILLIAM V. S. TUBMAN UNIVERSITY
Harper City, Maryland County

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP
IN GRAND CAVALLA VILLAGE: WVSTU-MESUAGOON PROJECT

Background and Rationale

This debut training package follows years of collaboration between the William V. S. Tubman University and the Grand Cavalla Village in Maryland County. Its immediate impetus followed a workshop conducted by the Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy and the Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education. Major objectives of the workshop were assessment of needs, gaps analysis, as well as provision of support for gender mainstreaming.

The participant to said workshop emphasized food insecurity as one of the major problems facing the vast majority of the widows, single parents, and teenage mothers of the all-female organizations. Madam Oyeh, a widow herself, stressed that the situation continues to be accentuated by the traditional system of gender based division of farm labor. She lamented that a woman without a husband as in the case of the vast majority of her compatriots who are unable to undertake all the activities in the farm is bound to suffer from food insecurity. She brought out some forms of skills training where widows and single parents should engage in to mitigate the problem.

The workshop presented variety of approaches were showcased including products of arts and crafts such as natural tie dyeing, soap-making, raffia weaving, jewelry making, as well as coconut shell carving. At a meeting following her return from the workshop, the women decided to get organized for collective action to seek assistance for training in some of the skills for which resources abound in the Grand Cavalla environment.

The University is grateful to MEASUAGOON for its interest in participating to the project particularly, the women empowerment through entrepreneurship, a project which is a component of the Integrated Village Development of Grand Cavalla which is initiated by the Academic Affairs headed by Dr. Elizabeth Q. Enanoria-Carbajosa, the Vice-President for Academic Affairs.

The Project hired Ms. Dolly Barnes as a project coordinator. The following were her responsibilities:

1. Implement the MEASUAGON-WVSTU Project on Women Empowerment through Skills Development and Entrepreneurship in Grand Cavalla;
2. Identify skills, assets and needs, interests and opportunities in arts and crafts and adopt projects to meet needs in collaboration with different groups in Grand Cavalla;

3. Build a pool of arts and crafts professionals to work with identified projects;

4. Design and deliver trainings and workshops for different community arts and crafts groups of women;

5. Build links with other groups and liaise with a wide range of people including local authorities, other schools, colleges and universities, companies for sponsorship and professional and special workers;

6. Prepares Monthly Report, Assessment and Evaluation of the Project;

7. Coordinate activities with the University Committee of the Integrated Village Development of Grand Cavalla and with the Office of the Vice President for Research and Sponsored Programs

8. Reports to the Office of the Vice-President for Academic Affairs

Prospects and Opportunities

- Grand Cavalla produces palm oil which can be provided locally for soap making, thus reducing the cost of soap making.
- Among the trainers are a few persons, including a high school graduate, who can be identified and trained as the focal persons for communication and sales with potential clients and maintain the records and book keeping required for sales. TU’s College of Management and Administration can focus some of its training to groom such persons.
- With its large volume of coconuts, the village is capable of producing coconut oil, a prime ingredient for making bath soap, but it does not have a coconut press to produce the oil. The people of Grand Cavalla can further reduce the cost of soap making and also supply ready markets from the production of their own coconut oil. If this is achieved, the soap making profits will increase, and two more products – coconut oil and bath soaps - can be sold from Grand Cavalla.
- Sources of wrapping supplies for the finished soap bars for the market is still being identified. The village principals are working on a name for their soaps.
- The current competing soaps on the markets in Maryland County for household cleaning and laundry are the imported powder and bar soaps and locally made iron soaps. The Grand Cavalla soaps can compete in this market for cleaning qualities, price, and availability and can find a niche market with those who buy to support the local economy.
These niche markets can include:

1. Tubman University - facilities maintenance, cafeteria,
2. Tubman University faculty and staff homes
3. Local government facilities maintenance
4. Local government officials homes
5. J. J. Dossen Hospital facilities and laundry
6. Cavalla Rubber facilities and laundry
7. Church facilities maintenance
8. Public school facilities maintenance
9. United Nations facilities maintenance and laundry
10. Wholesale to market women, stores and village road stalls
11. Restaurants

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

1. Raffia Mat and Fan Weaving

The number of females who registered for the class was quite low as there were only two out of fifteen. They were challenged in erecting the loom, threading, weaving and finishing. They required the cooperation of their male counterparts to cut the sticks for the loom. Five excelled in the training: Jacob Bedell, Otis Wisner, Moses Bryant, Kla Wisner, and Edward Woart. Jacob Bedell had the maturity to produce fine mats, but lacks the leadership skills to guide the other young people through continuous practice.

The trainees are able to produce mats suitable for placemats, bags, purses, lampshades and fans, sides suitable for sandals, coasters and cell phone holders, and strips suitable for designing straps and belts.

The lengths of these mats, sides and strips are on average only 20 inches in length, directly relating to the length of the piassava leaves located in Grand Cavalla and surrounding areas. Except for the belts, they can be used effectively in developing products listed above. Belts will have to have extensions of leather, webbing or heavy fabric extensions.
Dr. Elizabeth Q. Enanoria-Carbajosa, VPAA observes some Out-of-School Youth prepare Palm Leaves to make the raffia

The training included preparing black dye for the raffia using seeds and leaves of Christmas trees and iron shavings as a mordant, adding another color.

Raffia dyed in black using the leaves and seeds of Christmas tree.
A trainee works on his mat

The Raffia-Making Trainer, Moses Kokulo shows a finished raffia belt

A young trainee on the loom
Below are pictures of some finished mats to be used in product development of bags, sandals, belts.
2. Soap-Making

Two training sessions were conducted on soap making. One was in the University and the second was held in Grand Cavalla Village.

At the University, Ms. Myth Carbajosa, a chemistry Faculty trained the women of Grand Cavalla prepare soap using molders.
3. **Natural Tie Dyeing**

The trainees learned several techniques of designing, patterning, dipping, rinsing, starching and beating (ironing) dyed cloths. They were introduced to the process of adding iron shavings (tannic acid) to the dye bath which act as a mordant. Trainees were instructed to create designs using the following techniques:

- ✓ Diamond pattern was created by folding the cloth
- ✓ Open cow eye pattern was created by pinching and tying
- ✓ Closed cow eye pattern created by tying
- ✓ Multi pattern was created by stitching
- ✓ Sitty pattern was created by stitching
- ✓ Yamma yamma
- ✓ Weaving

Other processes taught were:

- ✓ Dipping designed fabrics into the dye baths
- ✓ Removing dyed fabrics from the dye baths for oxidation in the sun
- ✓ Rinsing the dyed fabrics until the rinse water is clear
- ✓ Starching the dyed fabrics
- ✓ Beating (ironing) the dyed fabrics

*The VPAA, Ms. Dolly Barnes, Program Coordinator, Ms.Iona-Thomas-Connor pound seeds with the women of Grand Cavalla to prepare the natural tie dye*
Trainees sew designs onto fabric prior to dyeing

Stitching and drawing patterns
Mr. Bah, trainer for natural tie dye
Demonstrates the “cow eye pattern:

Fabrics dyed with mango bark resulting in a beautiful gray color in the diamond, cow eye and multi patterns.
The VPAA, Dr. Ma. Theresa Ferolino, Dean of the College of Agriculture and Food Science, Mr. Henry Woart, coordinator of the Integrated Village Development Grand posed with the trainees who were preparing natural tie dye.

Fabrics just removed from the dye baths of tomato dust, kola nut, avocado seed and mango bark with tannic acid.

The rinsing process and loosening the ties.
Rinsed gray (mango/iron shavings or tannic acid) fabrics hung to dry

Drying the dyed fabrics
Preparing cassava starch

Starching the fabrics

Spreading starched fabrics to dry
Trainees put finishing touches to “beating logs” which serves the purpose of ironing the cloths.

Folding the fabrics in preparation for beating.
Folded fabrics ready for beating

Below: Beating (ironing) the fabrics
Beaten (ironed) and finished fabrics
4. Jewelry Making

In spite of the restrictions posed in obtaining more sophisticated jewelry findings (clasps and crimp beads) and other types of beads (ceramic, wood, etc., and acknowledging the distance away from bead markets, trainees were able to design and string the following pieces of jewelry using beads and components that were donated and purchased:

- Bracelets which are self closing
- Lariats (rope) which do not require findings
- Beaded earrings
- Coconut shell earrings
- Single strand chokers (16”)
- Double strand chokers
- Single strand necklaces (18”)
- Double strand necklaces
- Knotted necklaces
- Single strand long necklaces or waist beads
- Double strand long necklaces or waist beads
- Triple strand long necklaces or waist beads
- Adorning coconut shell receptacles and accessories with beads and seashells
- Ankle bracelets
- Found seashell necklaces
Trainees started on “knotted” necklaces. The technique was explained, demonstrated and a sample was shown for easy reference. Some have learned to use a small and pointed object to ease the knot close to the beads, while others preferred to work the knot close to the beads with their fingers. Both techniques work, but using the pointed object is faster and cleaner, while using the fingers tend to soil the threads if hands are not clean, and may also require a second knot if the first one was not closely placed to the bead.

Making knots using a small pointed object

Centering the beads for knotting
WVSTU Professor Robert Jones, Chair of the College of Agriculture and Food Science, demonstrates the use of a drill to score and bore holes into seeds and shells.
Seashell necklaces in progress and completed one worn by Oye Bryant

making double strand chokers
Terah French, a US Peace Corp who teaches in the College of Education, WVSTU trained the women self-closing bracelets.

Trainees were also instructed in the techniques of making lariats or ropes, which are self-tying. In producing this item, trainees grasped the concept of coordinating pendants and rope colors, displaying their own delightful creations as seen below:

Trainees wearing lariats they produced.
Other styles of completed lariats

Choker, earring and bracelet

Trainees wear their completed knotted necklaces
5. **Coconut Shell Carving**

The training covered the following:

- Identifying types of coconut shells for carving
- Introduction to materials and supplies used in the carving process
- Introduction to tools used in carving
- Preparation of coconuts for carving
- Types of products to be carved from coconut shell

*Carving earring components*
Jewelry products combined with coconut shells and beads
Various techniques involved in carving receptacles, soap dishes and hair barrettes
Receptacles prepared for finishing processes.

Dippers and hair barrettes in production
Carved coconut shell products after varnishing

decorating a cup with raffia and beads
6. **Entrepreneurship Training**
Prof. Alexander Quaye, Faculty of the College of Management and Administration began his training on February 27th 2013.

On March 24th Tubman University’s AES accommodated a display and sale of cleaning soap, dyed fabrics, jewelry and raffia mats in its cafeteria, to expose the first works of the trainees. Two TV monitors in the cafeteria simultaneously ran a photo display of all classes, showing trainees in the processes of production. The objective of the display and sale were to provide practice in the following:

- How to set up a table display
- How to display each type of product to maximize customer viewing and purchasing
- Placing prices on products
- How to describe contents, care and use of products
- Taking customer orders for raffia mats, dyed fabrics and jewelry
- Receiving payment with thanks
- Making receipts
- Returning change with thanks
- Centrally receiving payments for subsequent reconciliation by receipts

The products were well received by faculty, students, staff and visitors, including former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mrs. Bankie King Akerele, TU’s visiting presidential scholar, Dr. Diane Adams, and College of Agriculture visiting expert, Mr. Brad Brown, who made purchases and placed orders for mats and dyed fabrics.

Because these products were “first efforts” of the trainees, prices were marked way below regular market prices for these reasons:

- Jewelry – many of the beads used in chokers and necklaces were donated and recycled beads.
- Dyed Fabrics – Some fabrics had been exposed to mildew and some colors were very faint.

The first batch of soap had been sold in the village, and only samples were shown. The raffia mats suitable for placemats were sold at regular prices of $4.00 each.

Below are some photos from the display and sale:

Several interactions with customers resulted in first time real market experiences to inform and develop hone trainees’ skills in selling, display, order taking, receipt writing, accepting checks, and lay-aways with partial payments. Back in the village, the trainees who attended the display reported their experiences with their counterparts. Several issues developed which they now identify as issues to address immediately, including the management of their sales funds for reinvestment and shares, while operating as a group. Each specialty group will operate independently.
Each trained group has identified the following positions to manage its business:

- A leader who represents that group with ability to speak English and communication skills about its work
- A secretary who can write orders and receipts
- A treasurer with number skills
- A quality control person to ensure all products and orders are correct

WVS Tubman University’s College of Management and Administration will work with the villagers to take its products to market, develop them into a cooperative to access savings and loans associations and other benefits of traders. This will require some financial support.

We have identified and scheduled the following sales opportunities for selling the products during the months of April to August 2014:

- Monthly sales around pay days at TU’s Cafeteria – Gbalee Gray
- Sales during TU’s graduation season – TU’s AES Gbalee Gray
- Sales from TU’s placement of products in its bookstore – TU’s AES Gbalee Gray
- Purchase of soap from TU’s AES – Gbalee Gray
- Grand Cavalla graduation day – Trainees to sell their products
- Display and sale at Harper’s City Hall, sponsored by Supt. Nazarene Tubman
- Display and sale at July 26th celebration, Harper City – Supt. N. Tubman
- Order for tie dye scarves service – Creative Hands
- Order for raffia mats, sides and belts – Creative Hands
- Order for coconut shell products – Creative Hands due July 2014

Prof. H. Woart, Trainer Papayou Musah and Mr. Gbalee Gray examining products
**Linkages Built**

1. Minister Julia Duncan Cassell of the Ministry of Gender and Development has agreed to showcase and invite inquiries for production of soap, natural dyed textiles, coconut shell products, raffia products and jewelry made in Grand Cavalla. This project will provide a concept paper to the Ministry for its 2014 sponsorship programs to its partners.

2. The following sales outlets have committed to selling products from Grand Cavalla on a consignment basis:
   a. Afropolitan Boutique, Monrovia
   b. Kasawa Boutique, Monrovia
   c. Peace Café, Monrovia

2. The following entities have agreed to purchase products with terms of 50% payment on delivery, and 50% in 45 days:
   a. Chic Afrique at Palm Resort Hotel, Paynesville
   b. Creative Hands, Harper and Washington, DC
   c. Harper’s mayor and Superintendent Tubman have been made aware of the availability of soaps made in Grand Cavalla for use in their offices.
   d. Mrs. Magdalene Wilson, one of the reunion members and the procurement officer at University of Liberia, has promised to look into the possibilities of obtaining GCV soaps once she tries samples of them.