Community Incubator - Fostering innovation in local community organizations

Kenya
Sarah Welch
Budget: $50,000 - $100,000
Website: http://www.bethechangekenya.org

- At risk youth
- Community development
- Poverty alleviation
- Mentorship
- Sustainable development
- Youth leadership
- Transparency

Project Summary

Elevator Pitch

Concise Summary: Help us pitch this solution! Provide an explanation within 3-4 short sentences.

Increase the impact of local community organizations by fostering the creativity of local youth and business leaders to create innovative solutions to community problems. We want to jump start community action projects as a form of sustainable income. Starting in the slums of Nairobi, we will expand to other resource poor areas throughout the world.

About Project

Problem: What problem is this project trying to address?

The slums surrounding Nairobi are full of disease, street children, garbage and crime. But they are also full of hundreds of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) run by slum dwellers, working off of non-existent budgets, some trying to make a dollar, and others really trying to make a difference. With all the international NGOs based in Nairobi, few enter the slums, and even fewer consider spending money and resources cultivating these community organizations. Seen as wrought with corruption and expecting handouts, few of these CBOs are used as eyes into the communities they serve. Even though the 'handout' model was initially created by NGO's who wanted to offer incentive's to locals to attend trainings. There are organizations that operate in the slums, especially Kibera (2nd largest slum in Africa), but the 'handout' model continues as government workshops offer 'travel expense' for attending conferences and trainings, HIV education comes with a small stipend, and usually without it, attendance is dreary. So the cycle continues of organizations asking for and receiving handouts, and NGOs then complaining of corruption. Working on the inside of one of these CBOs for the better part of a year, gave me the insight to really see this issue clearly as a parasitic relationship between 'foreign aid' and community work. A relationship that needs to be broken down and reestablished in a productive, positive way.

Solution: What is the proposed solution? Please be specific!

Sustainable development projects are popping up all over developing countries, often going to rural areas to work with the 'poorest of the poor'. Often these organizations source young U.S. college graduates to work as interns or fellows and manage the programs. Our approach depends on training local young adults and local executives to build their local institutions. We believe these young adults are the future of their country, and it is important to bring them into their local communities to create change. So rather then bring in young, smart students from the local universities, and teach them how to innovate and create change. Eventually, these local youth will take over complete operations of the organization thus creating a financially viable career path within community development. Next, our 'no handout' model requires the organizations we are working with to actually invest a small amount in our program which is opposite of the current practice of offering stipends for trainings. We believe this is necessary to combat the 'handout' mentality created by decades of international aid. Lastly, our community network approach offers a combatant to government corruption and a format to lobby for long-term changes. International NGOs avoid governments in developing countries because of corruption, but this only creates a divisive reality where the government can continue to ignore the needs of the people. Our approach gives community organizations the ability to come together and voice their issues with real power.

Impact: How does it Work

Example: Walk us through a specific example(s) of how this solution makes a difference; include its primary activities.

We build the innovative capacity of local community organizations by creating connections with the organizations on several different levels. We bring in trained young adults to create entrepreneurial projects, and source for local resources. Simultaneously, local executive mentors teach the directors of the organizations best practices, financial accountability, monitoring and evaluation tactics, and management skills. Lastly, they go through our impact training which emphasizes creating sustainable and scalable community organizations that can measure their impact clearly.
These trainings and connections allow community organizations to better serve their communities and create solutions that are clear and sustainable. It also creates a network of organizations and leaders to lift up the future of community development careers. In order to sustain our program activities, and further develop leadership skills, these organizations will organize trainings for International NGOs and larger Non-profits to learn more about working with their community.

About You

Organization:
Be the Change-Kenya

First Name
Sarah

Last Name
Welch

Twitter

Facebook Profile

About Your Organization

Organization Name
Be the Change-Kenya

Organization Country
Country where this project is creating social impact, NA

How long has your organization been operating?
Less than a year

Is the project that you are entering related to this organization?
Yes

Innovation

What stage is your project in?
Operating for less than a year

Share the story of the founder and what inspired the founder to start this project

Two young women, Sarah Welch and Natalie Finstad, independently worked in community based organizations in Nairobi's slums. Individually they saw organizations operating off of nothing, but sacrificing all their time and energy, just to keep children off the street. While in Kenya, Natalie Finstad started Be The Change - Kenya as a way to bring young adults into community organizations, teach them leadership and build the resources of the organization. Sarah and Natalie did not meet while in Kenya, but both returned to the U.S. inspired by what they experienced. Through networks, Natalie and Sarah met and shared their idea of creating an organization that fostered this community spirit and connected it with viable, sustainable resources. Natalie's background in community organizing and Sarahs background in organizational development combined to create our unique model of building leaders and organizations in the Nairobi community.

Social Impact

Please describe how your project has been successful and how that success is measured

Be the Change – Kenya opened by establishing an experimental short-term partnership with Christ Chapel Orphanage in the Huruma Slum outside Nairobi. In our short time at the orphanage we are proud to report that we:
- Mobilized over 7,000 USD to pay salaries and provide food at the home for 4 months.
- Offered basic instruction to the staff for financial accountability and record keeping.
- Recruited and trained mentors for each resident at Christ Chapel.
- Provided free medical care at the home in the form of a drop in clinic.
- Trained 17 young adults in the Ganz leadership development initiative.

Our success is measured by the ability of our partner organizations to reach their goals and the increased capacity of the leadership teams we train. Above is one sample of measurements we will use, but we are developing standard indicators to measure organizational performance before and after we enter the picture. Measurement and evaluation of impact is very important to our organization, and will be a key part of what we teach to our partner organizations.

How many people have been impacted by your project?

How many people could be impacted by your project in the next three years?

101- 1,000

How will your project evolve over the next three years?

Beginning with 5 partner organizations and 30 young adults next year, we will be expanding to create a network of more then 25 organizations and
200 young adults in the next three years. In the second year we will begin offering services such as targeted community assessments, and 'Connect to the Community' Workshops. These services will be targeted at International NGOs, and larger Non-profits in order to sustain our program operations. For the first three years, we will work with community organizations in the same field of work (child poverty), but by year four will be entering into a new field. Not only will we be expanding into a new field, but we will begin research to expand a branch into a new urban area in the world. By year three, our model will be more clear for expansion.

Sustainability

What barriers might hinder the success of your project and how do you plan to overcome them?

Financial sustainability and community buy-in are our largest barriers. To ensure community investment our approach creates community from the onset, by insisting that we are in this together and are here to learn as much as we teach. We begin by approaching the community organizations and assessing their needs collectively. Also we are very clear from the onset that we do not give handouts, and continually insist on the importance of education and training for advancement. We also use our close relationships with young adults and our local advisory team to advocate for our program as well as relationships with the local city council. Our model insists that we create solutions that come from the community.

Creating financial sustainability is always difficult, while creating financial dependency is easy. We start first with ourselves, by creating a plan to reach financial sustainability through income generating activities. Our income generating activities use our closeness to the community in order to advance our mission. We will offer workshops and trainings, to international organizations and NGOs who can afford to pay. These services will include:
- Targeted Community Assessments
- 'Connect to the Community' workshops
- Monitoring and Evaluation advisement
- 'How to work with CBOs' workshops

These trainings will be led by our partner organizations and local youth. This will create a forum for local interaction with large international organizations fighting to alleviate poverty as well as create a source of income for our program operations. With this same model, we work with our partner organizations to create a working plan to financial sustainability. Our young adults are trained in starting up income projects with our partner organizations, and can apply to us for the initial investment costs. Also by focusing on local resources, and funding, we avoid the problem of international pullout.

Tell us about your partnerships

With our pilot project, we have established partnerships with several orphanages operating in Nairobi both who need assistance and who offer examples. There is group of trained young adults from the University of Nairobi who are spreading the word and currently fundraising for the organization. We have presented at and worked with the Rotary club in Nairobi, District Officers, local churches, a local advisory council of executives, and local community leaders running successful orphanages. We also have strong partnerships in the U.S. with the Episcopalian Church in Houston and Boston, and connections with non-profit groups and individuals in Northern California. While we have support from many church groups, our organization is non-religious.

Explain your selections

Our project is currently supported by donations from friends, family, individuals, businesses, and the Episcopalian church. We are expanding to include foundations, and eventually customers, but for start-up costs we are depending on our fundraising hubs in Boston, Houston and Northern California. Currently we have 20% of our fundraising goal, and plans to obtain the other 80%.

How do you plan to strengthen your project in the next three years?

We are developing fundraising hubs throughout the U.S. that will be run by a U.S. advisory board year round. There are also several grants we are applying to for program costs. Once we have an established program, we will begin to offer workshops as a way to create income to sustain our operating costs. These workshops and trainings will begin in year two, and by year three will be able to cover 40% of our operating costs. From there we will expand our services to include community assessments, and other consulting services.

Challenges

Which barriers to employment does your innovation address? Please select up to three in order of relevancy to your project.

PRIMARY
Lack of skills/training

SECONDARY
Lack of access to information and networks

TERTIARY
Inadequate transparency

Please describe how your innovation specifically tackles the barriers listed above.

We train directors of community institutions in management and local young adults in community organizing which increases their professional skills.

We give access to information and networks by creating cross-community collaboration, and offering access to new networks, international and local, via our training model.

By working with community organizations from the ground up, we foster honest and clear communication. As an incubating organization, we teach the value of transparency, we do not demand it. This addresses a real issue of transparency in organizations, and attempts to show the benefits of being transparent in a clear measurable way.
Are you trying to scale your organization or initiative?
If yes, please check up to three potential pathways in order of relevancy to you.

PRIMARY

SECONDARY
Repurposed your model for other sectors/development needs

TERTIARY
Grown geographic reach: Multi-country

Please describe which of your growth activities are current or planned for the immediate future.

Our current growth activities involve increasing our existing impact through addition of more partner organizations and local young adults. This will begin in January 2012 as we start a new session of capacity building and community organizing. These organizations will begin a 18-month partnership with us that will include management training, executive mentors, and trained youth groups working towards their goals. Our first partner organizations will target child poverty, and as we expand our services we will address organizations tackling other community issues.

Do you collaborate with any of the following: (Check all that apply)

Government, NGOs/Nonprofits, For profit companies, Academia/universities.

If yes, how have these collaborations helped your innovation to succeed?

These collaborations create the connections within the community that allow us to permeate and create real impact. In order to work with local Community Organizations, the local city council is needed to establish credibility. To bring in resources to local organizations, we use for profit companies for sponsorship and the donation of services. We also work with universities to present our project and create interest among the young adults for participation in our training program.

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