

2006-2007 Annual Report

Rural Communities Empowerment Center (www.rcempowerment.org)

It starts, one community at a time.....

The year started with changing the name of the organization from Community-Based Libraries and Information Technology (CBLit) to Rural Communities Empowerment Center (RCEC). The rural communities we serve (our partners) and the advisors to the organization felt the name be changed to reflect all the services/activities delivered by the organization.

We continue to empower the communities we serve in. We still believe strongly in working in partnership with local schools, have local champions and have our Community Resource Centers (CRCs) managed by communities where they are established. Our core programs, activities and services are working well and having the expected impact on the communities. Mentoring programs of reading, writing, math and science initiated for 13 to 17 year-olds are already in great demand.

Last year we welcomed two volunteers, a husband and wife from the American World Jewish Society (AWJS) to help the Apirede Community Resource Center with the Children and ICT activities.

Our Sponsors

African Women Development Fund (AWDF), Levitt Foundation, OPEC Fund, Open Society Initiatives for West Africa (OSIWA), UNICEF, UNDP, UniversalGivings, World Bank and individual donations.

Our Activities & Services

Libraries: make available reading materials, a place to do school homework and receive mentoring in reading and

writing, math and science. Teachers use the library resources to supplement their own teaching materials and to pursue their out-of class study needs.

ICT programs: train children and teachers from primary grades through high school as well as adults in introduction to ICT to help break their isolation and make them competitive. Also being implemented is the wireless node/access options to make Internet access available to thousands more rural people. www.wirelessghana.com

Children's programs (3-5yrs): provide a place for the community's youngest members to read, explore, participate in educational and fun-filled activities, learn early what technology can do for them, and offer them the opportunity to learn and dream.

Women programs: make available empowerment programs to develop or enhance skills for economic gains through ICT, communications skills training and tailoring. It is also a forum to articulate their specific needs.

Our Impact on the communities we serve

In less than four years in two pilot towns and surrounding communities:

- Citizens are displaying more confidence and excitement over and awareness of the benefit of technology and information exchange. Over 3,000 school children and close to 1000 adults have been given introductory classes in ICT and more than 7,000 have used the Internet.
- Gender equality is on the rise. Women are now articulating their needs and those of their children,

providing suggestions and getting the men to accept constructive criticism. Adolescent school girls' drop-outs are receiving training in tailoring. One of the bags sewed by the women for a designer in the U.S. was featured in the May 2007 Essence magazine as one of the "must have" bags for the summer.

- Interest in reading has increased sharply with over 20,000 people mostly school children using the library facilities.
- Mentoring programs are provided in reading, writing, math and science for 13 to 17 year- olds. The goal is to help them return or stay in school and to obtain admission to better public schools and avoid at-risk behaviors.

Other Initiatives undertaken

Wireless Project

In 2006, we said an emotional good bye to John Atkinson, a Peace Corp volunteer who worked with the Apirede Resource Center from late 2004 -2006. During this period, the Resource Centers (Apirede and Jumapo) with John Atkinson as the project manager initiated and completed the first phase of the wireless project (Open Access with 10 nodes). This first phase provided access to schools in the Akwapim North district of Ghana. The second phase to be completed in 2008 will strengthen the network infrastructure and expand the network from 10-20 nodes to provide more access points to more high schools, small businesses and church groups.

The success of this project attracted the attention of **InfoDev of the World Bank** who contracted the Apirede Resource Center to do a case study of Open Access using the

wireless project. The project became part of a major study on Open Access from many developing countries by InfoDev in 2007.

The Wireless project is a major source of income towards the sustainability of the CRCs.

Collaborations

Collaboration with UNDP

The UNDP Regional office in Ghana in collaboration with Ghana Investment for Telecommunications (GIFTEL) has recognized Rural Communities Empowerment Center as a partner in their effort towards developing ICT infrastructure and building ICT capacity in the rural areas.

As a formal recognition of the partnership and acceptance of our CRCs as part of the Communication and Information Centers (CICs) project in Ghana, the UNDP in October 2007 sponsored workshop in ICT capacity building in the Apirede Community Resource Center (ACRC)

Outcome of workshop

- 10 trainers (train-the trainer) for the Resource Center were given training in advance ICT skills and ICT training delivery methodologies.
- 125 beneficiaries comprising students, teachers and other participants from the community were also trained as a step towards creating ICT awareness in the district, and strategically positioning the ACRC for future training.
- The training also stirred up interest in ICT and citizens within the district have been enrolling for ICT training at the ACRC.

- The District Administration showed their commitment to the whole process by sending key staff members for training. The District Administration also agreed to share connectivity cost once LAN at the district assembly office was complete.
- Part of UNDP plan for 2008, is to use the CRCs (Apirede and Jumapo) for periodic beneficiary training programs to be funded by UNDP. Future beneficiary training program in ICT will target J.H.S. / S.H.S. school leavers and others to build the capacity to function as a data entry/training center.
- The center has attracted more patronage as a result of the beneficiary training.

UniversalGiving

From 2007-2008, we are registered with UniversalGiving, a web-based global charitable giving platform where individuals can contribute to exceptional organizations. We are sponsoring school children in ICT and mentoring programs with the donations.

Way Forward

Rural Communities Empowerment Center believes the work it is doing helps the government in meeting its millennium goals in education and social development in rural communities. It is clear the resource centers are having a positive impact and generating tangible benefits in education and social development of the communities. Children are reading, learning, receiving mentoring, becoming curious, developing interest and using ITC. Parents are enthusiastic and encouraging their children.

The communities have taken on the responsibility of managing the resource centers with the chiefs and elders. Women are acquiring communication skills, becoming more aware of their rights. Their new found economic independence – assertiveness, learning/enhancing skills, creating jobs for themselves and embarking on e-commerce is liberating and providing them the confidence to participate in actions and decisions that affect their lives and those of their families.

We are still be dedicated to the:

- Continuation of our core activities and services
- Expansion of the mentoring program to include more students
- Establishment of two additional Resource Centers

How you can help

Help us by providing funds to:

- Mentor adolescent girls and boys ages 13-17 in reading and writing, math and science for admissions to and success at some of the better public high schools and avoid at-risk behavior.
- Train women and adolescent girls in tailoring to enhance skills or gain skills.
- Continue the ICT connectivity/access fees.
- Provide organized training for high school drop-outs in data entry skills and other ICT software and programs.
- Construct additional Community Resource Centers.

Visit us at www.rcempowerment.org