

Health Development Initiative (Kigali, Rwanda)

8 weeks, dates TBD | Estimated cost: about \$3,000 | 2 Business Interns, 2 Avid Knitters

Partner

Founded in 2005 by a group of Rwandan doctors, HDI promotes community-based health care and development in Rwanda. They work to educate communities on health practices and empower providers to deliver better health services. Using a rights-based approach, they advocate for quality healthcare for disadvantaged and marginalized groups. Through this, they seek to bridge the healthcare inequalities in their country.

Proposed Project

“We would like to host a group of students over the summer to help us with a community development project for the Community of Potters of Cyaruzinge village. The community of potters, formerly known as the “Twa” pre-genocide, is a historically marginalized population in Rwanda. While sensitization efforts are reducing stigma from neighboring communities, thus enabling them to sell their goods outside of the village, community members continue to face challenges in paying the \$0.40 hospital fee to see a doctor if they are ill, much less sending their children to school.

Using a holistic approach, HDI began working with Cyaruzinge villagers in 2008 to through our community of potters health and development (COPHAD) program with the goal of empowering the community to become agents in their own development. Our work in Cyaruzinge has included a number of interventions such as providing community members with health insurance and school fees, nutrition interventions and education, housing construction, hygiene and sanitation initiatives, and economic development projects.

The Dusabane (meaning “let’s come together” in Kinyarwanda) cooperative was formed in 2010 by 33 women in Cyaruzinge. HDI has sponsored a variety of trainings for the women, including basket-weaving, jewelry-making, and basic sewing skills. Despite these trainings, the women still face challenges when it comes to mass-production, quality control, and finance management. The women spend most of their time weaving baskets, but basket-weaving is very time consuming and expensive; consequentially, the women are not seeing much profit for their labor and have become discouraged with the process. They find it challenging to keep their products clean because they do not have the money to buy soap or water to clean their hands, they work in houses with dirt floors, and they don’t have anywhere to store their products. They also lack the business and financial skills to manage their funds and plan for future production needs. To combat these challenges, we would like to work with students to help us strengthen the Dusabane women’s cooperative in Cyaruzinge through diversifying their artisan skillset and providing them with business management and entrepreneurial skills.

Knitted goods are becoming increasingly popular in Rwanda, and selling knitted products is thus far a relatively untapped market. Knitted goods are inexpensive to make, sell at high prices, and are easy to mass-produce, especially with the help of knitting machines. There are also two organizations (Indigo Africa and Kaymu) that are extremely interested in working with the Dusabane women IF they can mass-produce quality, clean items. We would like to host students who enjoy knitting to teach our women to knit items that sell well in Rwanda like hats, scarves, socks, shawls, sweater vests, and blankets. Students would lead trainings and work alongside the women to produce a variety of items that will be ready to sell in local markets.

There are a number of “copy cat” businesses in Rwanda, and cooperatives that specialize in handicrafts are one of them. The cooperative members know that if they want to be competitive in the future, they will need to expand their business and entrepreneurial skills. For this reason, we would also like to host students who are well-versed in business development and financial management to train the women in basic business and entrepreneurial skills. This will help the cooperative to professionalize their business by integrating basic finance and organizational systems. With basic entrepreneurial skills, they will be challenged to identify community needs and develop new ideas for future expansion. Students will lead trainings and work alongside the women to improve their financial systems and develop new ideas for expansion.

Women are the crux of community life in Cyaruzinge. They are charged with caring for the households, cooking, cleaning, and caring for all of the children. Research shows that when women have greater control over household income, children benefit as a result of more spending on food and education. As such, we expect that empowering the Dusabane cooperative members with the skills to expand their business and increase their individual income will have a ripple effect through the community, improving the education and nutrition status of the children and acting as a catalyst for lifting an entire village out of poverty.”

Business Internship (2)

These two students will train the cooperative in basic financial management and entrepreneurial skills. After the training, we would like the women to be able to keep a record of their purchases and sales, price their goods, plan for saving, manage a small shop, identify community needs, and come up with ideas for new businesses. Most of the project staff is not business-minded, so we welcome the opportunity to work with students to determine any additional skills the women may need.

Avid Knitter Internship (2)

These two students will work with our field officers to develop hands-on knitting trainings for 35 women. A few women have a basic knowledge of knitting and sewing techniques, but the students should be prepared to start from the basics. After the training, we would like the women to know how to make hats, scarves, socks, sweater vests,

shawls, and blankets. If there is time, we would like to expand their skills to more complicated items. We encourage the students to be creative in producing ideas for new items and designs.