



TOT: Training Of Trainers, Kenya

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A business setup programme for rural women run by Kenyan university students

The TOT (Training of Trainers) project started up in 2003 with help from Kianda Foundation and the European Union. The aim was for women from Ngarariga, Riara and Ngong to become promoters and owners of micro-businesses so they could better support their families. Since then 1,297 women have benefited from the programme. Most of them are aged between 25 and 50, though some are older than 60. These are grandmothers who have taken over the upbringing of their grandchildren because the parents have died of AIDS, so they need to start earning money again.

Teacher selection, training, and a business loan

The programme is taught by women who are studying business or economics at university. Susan Kinyua, programme director, says: "I explain to them the situation of the local women and our aims. Then they have a series of sessions on development and habits acquisition. During this time the students visit the homes of the 80 women who will take part in the course programme, and give them a questionnaire.

The second phase is sessions on how to run a business well: planning, budgeting, accounts, marketing, viability and savings. Each student takes charge of helping a small group to plan their own businesses.

The students monitor the women for six months to help them solve any problems that may arise, study initiatives, and evaluate possibilities for future expansion. Additionally, Kianda Foundation then puts them in contact with micro-credit programmes and helps them get loans to improve their businesses."

A benefit for everyone

The women who attend the TOT programme value it highly, because they learn to run their businesses with professional standards, and improve their standard of living. They particularly appreciate the life skills that are taught as part of the course – human and Christian virtues – because they discover ways to improve their characters and their way of working, and how to bring up their children well. All of this has a positive effect on the whole family.

Most of the University students find that participating in the TOT project helps them to work with a professional mentality. They have learnt to make better use of their time, to work diligently and constantly, and to be responsible about the things they have undertaken. They comment that they would like to give a social dimension to their jobs, for example by introducing specific community development targets in the organizations they will work in after graduating.

At the origin of the whole initiative lies an idea of St Josemaria Escriva, founder of Opus Dei. He said, “A university must educate its students to have a sense of service to society, promoting the common good with their professional work and their activity. University people should be responsible citizens with a healthy concern for the problems of other people and a generous spirit which brings them to face these problems and to resolve them in the best possible way. It is the task of universities to foster these attitudes in their students” (Conversations with Msgr. Escriva de Balaguer, 74).

At the forefront of economic growth

“Education and access to the means of economic emancipation are key. Women need to be able to raise loans and gain the necessary knowledge to improve their business’s productivity. Micro-financing is a way of helping women who have repeatedly proved their capacity to repay loans. Lack of opportunities is one of the characteristics of people living in conditions of extreme poverty.

We want women to be at the forefront of economic growth,” says, Susan Kinyua. She remembers a woman who had been widowed, lost everything and had to leave her children with their grandmother because they had nowhere to live. She thought that if she were on her own it wouldn’t matter where she lived. Thanks to the Training of Trainers project, she was able to set up a small business and buy a house, where she lives today with her children.

From KSh. 4,000 to 30,000 per month and accounts all square

Priscilla lives in Kamirithu. Before she did the basic TOT course she used to sell second-hand clothing in Limuru market, which is open two days a week. She knew nothing about marketing, and would put the items of clothing for sale, dirty and creased, in a pile on the ground.

After the training course she opted to open a “boutique” in her village, Kamirithu, and the results have been excellent. She displays her clothes, sorted, clean and freshly ironed, on hangers according to type – men’s, women’s, or children’s. The display is very inviting. She goes to the central market where second-hand clothing is imported wholesale, and selects what she wants to sell. She has developed good taste in combining blouses, skirts, scarves, etc. Before, with luck she would make 1,000 KSh. per week; now she earns an average of 30,000 per month. This is enabling her to expand her business by renting space beside her stall to have a greater variety of items. She keeps her accounts all square, as she learned on the course. She says that TOT changed her life; now she understands the meaning of things like profit margins, marketing, accounts, and saving, among many other things.

The Kianda Foundation is a not-for-profit educational organisation set up in 1961 to promote the educational, social and spiritual well-being of women in Kenya. The “Training of Trainers” programme was inspired by the teachings of St Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer, founder of Opus Dei.

Pope Benedict XVI has often referred to the need for genuine solidarity: “There will always be situations of material need where help in the form of concrete love of neighbour is indispensable. (...) For young people, this widespread involvement constitutes a school of life which offers them a formation in solidarity and in readiness to offer others not simply material aid but their very selves” (Deus Caritas Est, 25 December 2005, nos. 28 and 30).