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## INTRODUCTION

The following report highlights the results of the entrepreneurial partnership between Trestle Group Foundation and The African Centre For Women, Information and Communications Technology (ACWICT) supported by COFRA Foundation.

Trestle Group Foundation (TGF) is an innovative, change-provoking, Swiss-based non-profit organization dedicated to creating and expanding sustainable economic opportunities in emerging economies by supporting high-potential women entrepreneurs. The Foundation's mission is to empower women entrepreneurs in emerging economies by partnering them with established business executives who provide the critical "human capital" needed to ensure long-term success.

COFRA Foundation is part of the corporate philanthropy program of COFRA Holding AG – an internationally operating family company situated in Zug, Switzerland – active in retail, real estate, financial services, renewable energies and corporate investments. COFRA Foundation supports organizations with activities seeking to impact child and youth education and well-being; entrepreneurship; economic independence of communities and organizations; and human development.

## BACKGROUND

In August 2008, based on Trestle Group



THE AFRICAN CENTRE FOR WOMEN,  
INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS  
TECHNOLOGY

Foundation's Empowering

Women Entrepreneurs Partnership Program, COFRA Foundation provided financial support to complete the established entrepreneurial partnership with the African Centre for Women, Information and Communications Technology, Nairobi, Kenya.

The Partnership Program identifies qualified women entrepreneurs in emerging economies and partners them with established business professionals in developed countries who help them build the business skills, strategies, practices and networks needed to create new opportunities, to fulfill their potential and to achieve long-term success.

Led by Constantine Obuya, The African Centre for Women, Information and Communications Technology (ACWICT) is a pioneering Kenyan based Information and Communications Technology for Development Organization with a regional reach whose mission is to promote women's access to and use of ICTs as tools for social, economic and political advancement.

## KEY BUSINESS CHALLENGES ADDRESSED

- I. Organizational Stability – Currently registered as an NGO under Kenyan law, ACWICT required legal analysis and support to identify and apply for the most effective legal structure in order to move forward – allowing them to expand their mandate and operations, while ensuring their long-term sustainability.

### Results

- ▶ Facilitated by Trestle Group Foundation, ACWICT was provided a legal opinion, and the necessary legal support by Kusyimi & Co Advocates to register as company limited by guarantee under Kenyan law.
- ▶ The legal transformation from an NGO to a company limited by guarantee and support through registration process will allow ACWICT to charge market rates for its services, while reinvesting income and profits into the purposes of promoting women's empowerment through use of information and



Constantine Obuya, center





communications technologies. ACWICT will also be able to own property and enter into contracts in its own name, while limiting the financial liability of its members.

- ▶ Under Kenyan law, NGOs are challenged by the myriads of regulations and restrictions that apply to them. Additionally, the NGO Coordination Board has wide discretion to deregister NGOs. Being registered as a company by limited guarantee will eliminate these issues, as well as help to sustain and expand the organization.

- II. Program Management Focus – The ACWICT executive and program management focus was not properly aligned with outcome-based results needed to sustain and expand their flagship program – ‘Reaching the Unreached.’

‘Reaching the Unreached’ is a community based capacity building initiative that aims to equip women and women entrepreneurs in rural and urban communities in Kenya with ICT and entrepreneurship skills focusing on five thematic areas of national priority, namely agriculture, livestock, trade, fishing, and tourism.

The ACWICT executive and program management team was highly focused on the identification and selection (supply-side) of the women and young women program participants. They leveraged village networks, raised funding to support participants and supplied a nurturing environment to develop their skills.

A critical missing component of this attention is the focus on where to place (demand focus) these young women once they have been equipped with new skills and completed the program. There was no effective link to the broader communities to help the graduates gain employment.

### Results

- ▶ Trestle Group Foundation conducted an on-site, extensive, day-long executive workshop led by Trestle Group CEO Ralph Schonenbach. Through the workshop, it became clear that

## Partnership Program Highlights

ACWICT needs to better engage major employers within the community to create awareness about the newly trained, talented young women, now equipped with the required skills to work in these companies. Ideas developed to increase awareness included:

- Engaging executives from within the community to participate as guest speakers during skill building courses.
- Interview and develop relationships with large employers to better understand and determine which skills are required, and what types of positions are available.
- Proactively develop events such as job fairs that help connect the program graduates with potential employees.

By shifting the executive attention to a program demand focus, more women will gain employment, placement numbers will increase, and naturally, ACWICT will be able to attract new students based on the success of the job placement initiative. This will help ACWICT effectively scale their vital 'Reaching the Unreached' program.

In 2009, ACWICT's 'Reaching the Unreached' program is being delivered through six regional Community Technology Learning Centres (CTLCs) and is poised to equip more than 4,300 women with ICT and entrepreneurship skills.

Additional business consulting was delivered through the workshop and focused on assisting the ACWICT executives to better evaluate and define their financial model, value proposition and funding requirements.



Constantine Obuya,

### Quote

*"Thank you most sincerely for taking time to visit and work with us to re-focus our 'Reaching the Unreached' program to a new and sustainable model. We truly appreciate your continued support and look forward to working with you closely as we continue our efforts to transform women's lives through ICT in Kenya and the region."*

Constantine Obuya  
Executive Director, ACWICT

## LESSONS LEARNED

Pro bono executive support is critical for the survival of pioneering organizations like ACWICT that are still suffering from the fallout of the Kenya post-election civil unrest of 2007, as well as the current global financial crisis.

Organizational funding opportunities are limited. And a Kenyan economy that grew at a rate of more than 7% in 2007 is projected to grow at less than 2% in 2009. According to a recent World Bank study (In Africa, 'Poverty Has a Female Face'), the global economic crisis will drastically reduce African women's individual incomes as well as the budgets they manage on behalf of their households, with particularly damaging consequences for girls.

## NEXT STEPS

Continue efforts to ensure ACWICT's sustainability as an organization and expand their vital programs.

## EXECUTIVE SUPPORT

Executive support facilitated through Trestle Group Foundation included:

- ▶ Advocates for International Development (A4ID)
- ▶ Leah Wanjiku Kiguatha, Partner, Musyimi & Co Advocates
- ▶ Nyambura Musyimi HSC, MCI Arb Founder and Senior Partner, Musyimi & Co Advocates
- ▶ Paivi Rekonen, Managing Director, Information Technology, Credit Suisse
- ▶ Ralph Schonenbach, CEO, Trestle Group (site visit and executive workshop May 2009)
- ▶ Dana Brice Smith, Director, Trestle Group Foundation (site visit and executive workshop May 2009)



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