

The Village net NEWSLETTER

Serving Women in Africa through microloans, access to education and health care, and resources to provide water, power and sanitation.

Welcome to the first edition of The Village Net (TVN) newsletter. If you are just meeting TVN, we hope that our story will inspire you to become involved in the effort to end global poverty. If you are already familiar with us, here is an update of our activities in Ghana and Kenya since we last communicated with you. In either case, please visit our new website at www.thevillagenet.org for much more information!

The Village Net Joins World Effort to Eliminate Poverty in Ghana and Kenya

3 billion people live on less than \$2 per day. **Half of the world** does not have access to reliable power. **3 billion people** do not live in the most basic of sanitary conditions.

In Ghana, 1 in 5 women dies in childbirth, compared to 1 in 25,000 in the U.S. 33% of Ghanaian children will die of malaria.

In Kenya, 38% of the population dies from AIDS, and it is projected that the current trend will result in 2/3 of the country's children being orphaned by AIDS. **How can we live with these statistics? What can we do to stop this terrible reality?** There's plenty to do. We start with microloans, then work to provide resources for health, education and infrastructure projects.

Working with Women's Associations

TVN's microlending program is based on the Grameen Bank model. That is, groups of about five women apply for loans together and guarantee each other. The resulting higher repayment rate points to pre-established community connections and interdependence of villagers. The women help each other through times of crisis and as each woman succeeds, so do the other members of her group.



The Village Net takes this model one step further. We work with existing women's associations, which are very common in the villages. The associations have formed to provide support among

women with similar types of businesses, or for social or political reasons. They have rules for operation, elected officers, and the members pay dues (usually weekly).

The association serves as another layer of guarantee for TVN. If a group is struggling with a member who has lost a family member, or is coping with a serious illness, the association can step in with its dues reserves to help. Officers of the association assume leadership roles in making sure that everyone is able to make their loan payments on time. *Continued page 2*



A Personal Response to Global Poverty

Al Gore made a statement about global warming that I think fits perfectly with our work. To paraphrase, "When people hear about a situation that is so totally overwhelming in scope, they tend to move from denial to despair without stopping at the intermediate step of doing." Harriet Stephenson and I believe that there is so very much that each of us can do to impact poverty. It would be unrealistic to claim that the two of us and our many partners can eliminate poverty, but we can certainly help get rid of some of the barriers that keep people in that state. The Village Net is a wonderful story about all of the amazing people around the world who are taking action and effecting change in whatever way they can. We encourage you to get involved with us as we make our steady progress in this fight. Put some faces on the statistics you hear, let us help you put the media stories in a meaningful perspective, and help however you can. The rewards cannot be overstated. -- *Cindy Butler, Executive Director*

The Village Net Partners with Universities

As a long-time Professor at Seattle University, Harriet Stephenson has developed an extensive network of colleagues involved in the teaching and study of management, social enterprise and microfinance. This provides a wonderful opportunity for student involvement in village projects. We have students working on business plans for possible ventures, students training and providing individual counseling to village business owners, and students who are helping us develop systems to measure and improve outcomes. The Institute for Professional Studies in Accra's chapter of Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE) is mentoring borrowers in the WomensTrust hub of villages. *Continued page 2*

Board of Directors

Harriet Stephenson, PhD
Founder and Chair

Sue Mackey, Vice Chair

Mark Pomerantz, Secretary

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Results to Date:

- **120** Microloans made in Ofankor, Ghana
- **70** Microloans made in Mwaani, Kenya
- **70** Microloans made in Suswa, Kenya
- Literacy classes begun in Ofankor
- Business training and individual counseling offered in Ofankor



A starting loan of \$55 USD means a mother can put more food on the table, send one more child to school, or buy more inventory for her business.

The Village Net (TVN) Mission and Operating Principles

The Village Net partners with existing women's groups in African villages to empower poor, economically active women in their efforts to achieve personal, family and village sustainability. We work in the areas of finance, education, health and basic human needs (food, water, power, sanitation) as prioritized by the village women.

The way we implement this mission demonstrates our commitment that villages continue to thrive following graduation from our institutional support. Our model incorporates the belief that change within individual villages is not sustainable without an increase in cooperation and markets between villages. We identify areas in which multiple villages operate women's associations for the working poor. These village HUBs are then linked through access to capital, educational programs, health services and other opportunities for growth. In this way, we begin with individual women improving the lives of their families, which improves village capacity, and ultimately lends to regional growth.

We do not believe in what is traditionally called charity; rather we provide resources so that people can pull themselves out of the constraints of poverty and then turn to help the people around them.

Growth of The Village Net

November, 2006	Harriet Stephenson meets principals from Womens Trust, Inc., who offer to act as fiscal sponsor to anyone wishing to adopt a village in Ghana	December, 2007	Cindy Butler hired as Executive Director
March, 2007	First visit to Ofankor, Ghana	March, 2008	Return visit to Ghana
April, 2007	Agreement signed with WomensTrust		Women's group in Omandjor village added to loan program (25 initial loans)
	First loan program launched in Ofankor Village (30 initial loans)		Literacy classes initiated in Ofankor
August, 2007	First visit to Kenya		Students in Free Enterprise graduate students begin providing business training and counseling to borrowers
September, 2007	Loan programs initiated in Suswa and Mwaani villages in Kenya (35 initial loans)		Identification of potential water project
November, 2007	Harriet returns to Ghana and Kenya and facilitates staff training in alternate countries. Discussions begin about cattle program for Kenya.	May, 2008	Ofankor - 120 loans Omandjor - 25 loans Mwaani - 70 loans Suswa - 70 loans The repayment rate to date is 99%

The young women in Africa represent the greatest untapped potential for societal change and growth. They need your support.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO GO TO AFRICA TO MAKE AN IMMEDIATE IMPACT! [DONATE NOW](http://WWW.THEVILLAGENET.ORG) AT WWW.THEVILLAGENET.ORG

Women's Associations, continued

They developed a system of batching so that individual women do not need to take time off of their businesses to make their payments. We are also tapping into the already existing association meetings (usually weekly) to provide educational opportunities. The borrowers work very long days and are usually reluctant to commit time to classes. But if they are already used to going to the association meeting once a week, we can extend the time of the meeting and incorporate training.



University Partnerships, continued

Harriet and her colleague, Professor Chris Weber, will be taking a group of 11 students from Seattle University on a study tour to Ghana this August. Prior to their trip they will assist The Village Net in exploring some potential Ofankor business opportunities.

Visit our website www.thevillagenet.org.

We'd welcome hearing from you!

Here Are Some Ways You Can Help:

- A group of medical professionals can volunteer for village clinics. Prenatal, infant wellness and first aid help are needed.
- Students can organize their classmates to write to groups of students in the villages.
- Teachers can help The Village Net staff work on curricula for literacy and business training.
- Anyone can raise money for a specific project - just talk to us about ongoing initiatives.
- Technical expertise is needed in the areas of energy, water, communication and medicine. Serve as a staff consultant.
- Hold a house party to raise funds.

Inspired to help? Call Cindy Butler at 206-226-8316 or email cindy@thevillagenet.org to talk about how.

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