

Zeitz Foundation Internship Report

Satubo Self-Help Group Project

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Overview

I have spent the last six weeks training the Satubo Self-Help Women's Group in business and bookkeeping skills. This report serves as a summary of the group's progress, the lessons I have learned, and my advice for replicating this project in the future. The women's bead-working group model is a challenging one that comes with a number of unique problems. However, I also believe that it has significant potential to economically empower women in the region. With the right training, support, and follow through, I believe that new groups can be developed to operate sustainably on their own.

If these sorts of groups are to succeed, however, they will need significant support, especially in the initial stages. In the beginning, I believe a trainer should visit the group each day, and ideally stay for about two full days each week. The most important times to check in are the mornings, when jobs for the day are delegated, and the evenings, when the group is recording what has been made that day. Moreover, significant efforts should be made to maintain a level of consistency in group employment. With only sporadic work opportunities, the group will not be able to adequately develop their skills, and the group members will lose faith in the value of the project.

I have trained James Lapur to continue my role with the Satubo Women's Group after I leave. He is very competent in the job, and I am confident that he will not only be able to successfully support the Satubo group but also eventually train new groups. The time commitment to train a new group is high, however, so he will probably be only to support one or two groups at a time. If the Zeitz Foundation's goal is to dramatically expand this program, it may be worth getting another intern to train more groups, and to help find additional customers.

Initial State of the Group

When I first arrived in Kenya, the group had a number of severe organizational problems. Biggest of all was the lack of a designated supervisor to ensure quality control. Jacqui Resley of Kenya Weaverbird sent up a number of items with me for the group to redo because they were poorly made. The group was also making more items than Jacqui had ordered. As such, she appeared to be close to terminating business with the group.

Moreover, the group did not have an effective system to organize and keep track of production. Jane and Pauline were filling out time sheets for the rest of the group, but they were not writing down what items each woman had made, and they did not understand the purpose behind the time sheets. They mailed down the time sheets to Jacqui, though the sheets were supposed to be for the women to use themselves. The group did not have a fair way of distributing payment, and initially each woman

was paid equally, regardless of the number of hours worked or the number of items produced. They also lacked a system to track their finances.

In part due to these organizational problems, some women in the group seemed not to trust their leadership. From their perspective, there was no clear system that prevented Jane or Pauline from being dishonest about the group finances. In addition, a number of divisions existed (and still do) within the group based on ethnicity, social groupings, or both. The combination of these issues posed serious barriers to the group's continued success.

My Role

My goal for the internship was to develop the skills and organization of the group so that they could operate successfully on their own, develop and maintain good relationships with customers, and effectively address future challenges without relying on external help. I tried to accomplish this in the following ways:

- Convincing the group, with the help of Liz Rihoy, to appoint and pay a full-time supervisor
- Working with the supervisors, with the help of Vincent Oduor and Jackie Nareyo of Ethical Fashion Africa, to develop standards and enforcement of quality control
- Teaching the supervisors to track production and finances with basic bookkeeping techniques: time sheets, individual production sheets, group production sheets, running tallies of finished items, delivery notes, invoices, and receipts
- Simplifying Jacqui Resley's pricing system into a clear and fair piece-rate payment system to compensate women for the specific amount of items they produced
- Teaching the supervisors how to create prices for new items
- Renegotiating the prices for items where they were too low
- Explaining to the group how the payment system works and why it is fair
- Communicating with Jacqui to minimize conflict
- Training James Lapur to continue supporting the group once I have left
- Writing a **Supervisor Checklist** to remind Jane and Pauline of all the skills and steps they have learned
- Writing a **Guide for Supporting the Satubo Self-Help Group** to help James effectively continue in my role once I leave

As much as possible, I tried to have the women think through problems and perform the organizational work themselves, rather than do it for them. As a neutral third party, I did my best to stay out of internal group conflicts while still building the group's trust in its leadership and in the new, unfamiliar system we were developing.

Progress and Current State of the Group

The group has made a lot of progress since I first arrived. The women have appointed Jane as a full-time supervisor, and Pauline takes over for her when she is gone. Both of them now confidently fill out time sheets, individual production sheets, and group production sheets to keep track of every item that each individual has made. We have convinced the group to accept the piece-rate payment system, and Jane and Pauline can competently manage it. Jane and Pauline also understand all the components that go into shipping down finished items, including how to fill out delivery notes, invoices, and receipts. They have developed a system for tracking the group's income and expenses as well. Finally, the group has developed a basic level of trust in the system, helped in large part by telling each woman how many shillings she makes each time she finishes an item.

The group still has a number of problems that it will need to work through. On Jacqui's most recent order, they again made many more items than was asked. This was in part due to a miscommunication, but it was also because the women still did not understand the importance of making only what is asked, and no more. Jane and Pauline were keeping track of what they asked each woman to make, but when the women finished, they would sometimes begin working on whatever their neighbor was doing without telling the supervisor. Moreover, it took a long time before the women understood the importance recording all of their work, and they would sometimes put away items without checking to make sure they were counted. We worked hard to rectify these problems by discussing the issue with the group, writing down each morning exactly what each woman is supposed to make, and developing an improved system for recording and putting away finished items. The threat of not being paid for items that have not been written down proved particularly effective, and the group had no such problems on Liz's order, which they worked on last week. It is still possible, however, that the group will make the same mistakes on more complicated orders in the future.

Finally, the group still has issues taking care of their materials. I discovered that they were mixing different sizes and colors of beads, which makes them much more difficult to use. We thus had to spend over an hour resorting all of the beads. When Vincent was here, he offered the good suggestion of keeping track of how many beads each item requires, and giving each woman only the right amount each day. I focused on other aspects of running the group and unfortunately was not able to get to this, so this technique would be a good area for James and Vincent to work on with the group in the future.

Moving forward, the group still faces significant challenges, but I believe they have the skills and understanding to work through them. James has been extremely helpful; he learned the basic skills very quickly and has been finding creative solutions to some of the group's organizational challenges. He put in many extra hours over the past two weeks practicing skills during his own time, such as calculating new prices in excel. I have reviewed the Supervisor Checklist with Jane, Pauline, and James

and the Guide for Supporting the Satubo Self-Help Group with James to make sure everything is understood. I hope that these documents will be useful in training new groups.

The final challenge for the group will be communicating with customers directly, especially Jacqui. I have instructed Jane to be in touch as much as possible with her customers directly by phone. However, when email is needed, I have asked that James write up the email and send it to me so I can proofread it and make sure his communications are clear. I will continue to support the group's communications by email until James and Jane are comfortable doing it completely on their own.

Conclusions

I have learned the following lessons from my time with the group:

- Group training takes significant time and repetition
- Initially, the group trainer should attend as many work days as possible each week until the group leaders are comfortable with the system
- Bookkeeping, accounting, and pricing processes can be simplified enough to be taught to groups, but they must be presented clearly and slowly
- Explaining the price per item to individual women as they complete their work is an effective way to communicate a piece-rate payment system
- Consistency with orders are important to retaining group skills and cohesion

I should also note that Vincent and Jackie from Ethical Fashion Africa were excellent teachers to both me and the group. However, as they are only able to visit the group periodically, the Zeitz Foundation should invest some of its own resources to reinforce and develop consistency for training. As such, my recommendation is that for the next month or two, James be allowed to visit the women roughly twice each week while they have work. This will both help the women solidify their skills and give James valuable training experience.

Finally, the women have asked, for future orders:

- That the customer make sure enough beads to finish the order have been sent up before they begin work
- That the order be large enough to cover their expenses, especially if the women have to ship down the finished items (roughly 7,000 shillings and above)

My best wishes for the continued success of the group and others like it in the future. I hope to stay updated and involved as the project moves forward.

Guide for Supporting Satubo Self-Help Group

Daniel Gastfriend, July 30, 2011

For James Lapur

Goals

As an advisor and supporter of the Satubo Self-Help Group, your goal should primarily be to build the group's skills and capacity to operate on its own. Rather than simply helping them do their work, you should always try to develop their skills so that they will not need any support in the future. Work to develop the group leaders' ability to organize orders, ensure quality control, and creatively address challenges as they come up. You should also try to build the group's confidence in its leaders and create an environment conducive to cooperation and fairness, rather than divisiveness and mistrust.

Finally, you can help the group by working to find new customers and employment opportunities. Having a steady stream of work is important to maintaining the women's skills, incomes, and belief that the project is worthwhile.

What You Can Do

Some of the ways in which you can accomplish these goals are:

1. Reinforcing the women's bookkeeping skills

With so many things to keep track of, it is easy to miss important steps. You can help the chairwoman and secretary by reminding them of everything they need to write down and keep track of during an order. Periodically check the Supervisor Checklist to make sure that they are following through with all of the important steps.

2. Identifying and correcting mistakes

There are a number of common mistakes the women make that cause problems. These include: putting away finished items without making sure they are written down; making an item without tying on their color string; making too many items; writing down the name of an item but not the length; and not keeping track of the number of finished items in a simple and clear way. You should always be looking for these types of mistakes and letting the group know how to avoid them in the future.

3. Finding better ways to operate

We have developed a good organizational system, but there are probably many ways in which things could be done better. For example, the system we have in place may have too many different pieces for Jane to do by herself once we leave. Be creative about finding new, simpler, and better ways to achieve the same goals.

4. Easing the workload for Jane and Pauline when they are learning new skills

In general, Jane and Pauline should not have to depend on you to help them with their work. But sometimes, when there is a particularly complicated order or when they are developing new skills and techniques, it can be helpful for you to take over the more tedious tasks. This will help keep them from being distracted while they are learning.

5. *Promoting group-wide skill building*

There are certain basic skills that most of the group members lack, the biggest of which is the inability to read numbers. Teaching the women to read a tape measure should be a long term goal for the group, and you can help keep them on track to achieve this. Eventually, teaching some of the members to fill out their own time sheets might be worth pursuing as well.

6. *Promoting an environment of mutual trust*

As a neutral third party, you should help the group develop trust in its leaders and in each other. Sometimes, questions of monetary distribution can cause divisions within the group. Be careful not to take sides in an argument, but rather explain why the system is fair and why things operate in the way that they do. Try to make sure that every woman understands and is comfortable with how the group is run.

7. *Communicating with customers by email when needed*

As much as possible, Jane and Pauline should be the ones to communicate with their customers. However, sometimes, email correspondence will be necessary—for example, when there is a long list of items, such as an inventory, that needs to be communicated. In these cases, you should send the necessary emails.

8. *Helping identify new customers*

Where possible, try to find new areas and opportunities for the women to sell their beads and make an income. Work with Liz and Njenga to brainstorm and pursue these opportunities. You should not need do all of the work for this, but you can help keep it a priority.

Training New Women's Groups

When you start training new women's groups, keep a few things in mind. First, start by explaining *why* a fair and clear system of bookkeeping is necessary. It is very important that the group understands the importance behind tracking each item. The same goes for quality control and appointing a full-time supervisor. Having the group believe in the importance of the system is the most important step.

When you begin teaching them practical skills, take things slowly. Work on one skill at a time. you introduce a new skill, be sure to explain why it is important, and why it will help them. In the beginning, you should be sure to keep track of all the important information yourself, so that if they miss something it will not ruin the order. As they develop more skills, gradually

decrease your involvement. Use the Supervisor Checklist as a guide to the important steps and skills that you will need to teach the group.

As a general teaching tactic, continually ask questions. Some of these should be to get feedback. For example: “Do you understand this?” “What do you think?” “What do you need most from me?” Others should be to get the supervisors to think through and practice the skills they have learned. “How would you do this?” “Why do you think this is important?” “How do you think we should solve this problem?” The more you can get the group members to think through things on their own, the more they will learn.

You have learned a lot in the past month and are going to do a great job. Just remember to keep things simple, clear, and fair. Good luck, and always feel free to contact me with questions!

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