

Kyoto Organization Teaches Sustainable Development Worldwide

In recent years, much attention has been focused on efforts by corporations towards Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), with programs such as philanthropy, scholarships, volunteer efforts, and community relations. Non Profit Organizations (aka Non Government Organizations), or NPO's, have been doing groundbreaking work in this area for over 100 years. Reborn Kyoto, an NPO in Japan, got its start in an interesting way, and since 1979, has been teaching those without resources about sustainable development for their families and their communities worldwide.

Sustainable development employs three "pillars": economic, social (human), and environmental in Low and/or Middle Income Countries (LMICs). The very nature of sustainable development requires long-term investment in these three forms of capital. As women are undervalued and underutilized worldwide, their potential contribution towards economic advancement has been marginalized. Promoting women's contribution of skills has been shown to support economic growth and to reduce poverty for an entire community. Moreover, sustainable development in one LMIC enhances societal well-being and promotes sustenance for developing countries throughout the world.

The benefits of sustainable development outweigh those of microfinancing, which is the provision of small loans for small entrepreneurs for the purpose of ending poverty in LMICs. Microfinance loans are currently provided in more than 100 countries worldwide and represent a \$300 billion market, whereby 86 million poor are serviced by 1,400 institutions. These are no-collateral loans and are made available in small amounts (on average \$200) for a short period of time (usually one year). Collection often takes place through peer pressure and intimidation. A downside of microfinancing is that it creates a "treadmill of debt" because borrowers often pay high interest rates and have to take out additional loans to pay off the first one.

Globally, barriers that adolescent girls face in pursuing education through secondary school include child labor, early marriage, natural disasters, gender violence, violent conflict, insufficient access to health care, and human trafficking. However, this can be countered. When women are economically empowered, they raise healthier, better educated families. When women are empowered to become stronger leaders, they contribute effectively to the finances of not only their families, but also their communities and their countries.

Kyoto

Reborn Kyoto's logo

Reborn Kyoto at its roots teaches sustainable development worldwide to support the economic independence of especially women in developing countries. For more than 30 years Reborn Kyoto has taught high-level cloth fabrication. The organization has carried out projects in Cambodia, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Yemen, Laos and Jordan, and most recently (since 2013), in Rwanda, where they work with economically disadvantaged young women and men, and some of the survivors of the 1994 Genocide.

The NPO provides training in the reuse of 100% silk fabrics from secondhand Japanese kimonos that are donated from all over Japan. Japanese sewing specialists instruct trainees in LMICs how to make various kinds of garments and other products using the kimono material. This is not just recycling secondhand kimonos but rather enabling the kimonos to be "reborn" as high value-added, modern garments. The trainees can acquire top-notch cloth fabrication skills in the course of the training programs in order to achieve economic independence.

Reborn Kyoto was founded by Mrs. Masayo Kodama, the organization's president. A mother and grandmother, she grew up in post-war Japan and felt "called" to give back to the world community by working for peace. She explained that her father, who was a military doctor, taught her that all people needed help in times of war. In fact, Mrs. Kodama's family was supported through foreign-aid food, which she says helped save her and other Japanese from starvation. She wanted to bring people hope, especially those suffering in LMICs. However, it wasn't until later in life that she was able to put her philanthropic principles into action.

With her first efforts, she distributed emergency supplies in Cambodia. Then, like the old adage, Mrs. Kodama metaphorically taught impoverished communities "how to fish" so that they could feed themselves and their children for the rest of their lives. She and other experts taught the traditional Japanese art of dressmaking skills in Vietnam and Yemen, training people how to create clothes that could be sold in western markets. Her organization bought the finished goods and sold them in Japan and in the U.S. The sale of goods, together with small grants and private donations, initially provided only subsistent revenues, but she learned how to build her organization. The NPO has two upcoming charity sales of their beautiful handmade 100% silk garments: Gion Summer Festival in the Reborn Kyoto shop (3rd week of July) and at Bead + Fiber in Boston's South End (November 14-15). Both are open to the public.

KyotoReborn Kyoto's latest project in Rwanda received support from the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs with grant assistance earmarked to empower the economically disadvantaged. (See video below.) The organization teaches economically disadvantaged young women and men, and some of the survivors of the 1994 Genocide to make resalable garments and develop and sustain themselves as financially viable and independent. On March 28th Mrs. Kodama received a tribute for work from MARITAGE, whose mission is to empower all women through Multicultural Art and Heritage. The honor was given as part of the United Nations' celebration of International Women's Month.

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Sources:

Reborn Kyoto, Non Profit Organization

Visit to Reborn Kyoto, March 14, 2013

Personal conversations with Yasuko Yamahira, Executive Officer/Project Director, REBORN KYOTO Non-Profit Organization, March 14, 2013 through April 9, 2014

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

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