

BYU students help distribute loans to Nigerian businesswomen

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Photo courtesy of Liahona Economic Development Foundation

BYU students instruct Nigerian businesswomen as part of a project to grant small loans to citizens of the developing country. David Maughan, Dan Nelson and Alan Westenskow spent over a month in Nigeria as part of the Liahona Economic Development Foundation program.

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Three BYU students teamed up this summer and helped distribute small loans to a group of women in Lagos, Nigeria.

David Maughan, Dan Nelson and Alan Westenskow joined the Liahona Economic Development Foundation in Nigeria from April 29 to June 7 to provide targeted market women in Lagos with small loans ranging from \$30 to \$100.

"We are helping people change their lives, not just giving them money," Westenskow said.

LEDf assists aspiring less-privileged Nigerians with access to small loans.

The loans provided by LEDf are specifically targeted to those clients who have small businesses they are dedicated to, are capable of paying back the loan and show they are in need of capital.

"I saw people who worked day after day just to be able to survive, yet they worked with smiles on their faces, happy to be working," Maughan said.

The women attended five meetings held by Nelson, Maughan, and Westenskow, who taught them basic microbusiness and microcredit principles. The women were also taught basic educational skills to help them become more self-reliant.

"They were starving for education and for the most part accepted and applied all that was taught to them. They arrived at each meeting dressed in their beautiful native dresses with head wraps and bright, colorful dresses. They were absolutely willing to sit in very, very hot and humid buildings for

hours with the desire to learn," Maughan said.

Those women who received the 14 loans are required to make monthly installments over a four to 12 month period at a 2.5 percent interest rate. After the first borrowers pay back their first installment, other qualified applicants in the groups will receive loans.

"The loans that we lent were effective and helped the market traders expand their small shops, but more effective was the training given about how to become women of substance, how to set goals, the importance of ethics, the basics of accounting and so forth," Maughan said.

Warner Woodworth, a professor of organizational behavior at BYU, discovered LEDF and brought it to the attention of three graduate students. James Jacobs, Shad Morris and Chijoke Evens then wrote a proposal for a five-year joint LEDF/BYU venture. Their proposal outlined how to choose clients and how to handle the payback of approved loans.

Evens, Jacobs and Morris were unable to go to Nigeria and gather additional information for their proposal.

Maughan, Nelson and Westenskow were made aware of the opportunity to go to Lagos from Woodworth.

Except for a small amount of money from a professor on campus and the Center for Entrepreneurship, they paid their way to Africa and delivered the proposal to Dr. Adekunle Hassan, the founder of LEDF, Westenskow said.

"What these guys did was great. They went over there to verify that this was an ethical, incorrupt process," Woodworth said.

Westenskow said they felt pretty nervous going to Nigeria because it is the most populated country in Africa and has a very corrupt government. He said the Nigerians looked out for them and would warn them about any impending danger.

"Things fell into place as well as they could've and we were as successful as we could've been," Westenskow said.

Dr. Hassan, the teams contact with LEDF, let them stay at his home and provided transportation for them.

"Dr. Hassan is one of the most honest men I know," Westenskow said.

Hassan is a member of the LDS Church and the founder and chairman of LEDF. He is an ophthalmic surgeon of international repute. Hassan is also the chairman of Summit Healthcare Hospitals LTD., Summit Healthcare Pharmaceuticals and an associate professor of ophthalmology at the Ogun State University, Ago-Iwoye.

LEDF, over the past two years, has made it possible for more than 60 people to receive loans. Dr.

Hassan spends half the year practicing in the United States and half the year in Nigeria. The money he makes in the United States is used for these loans, Westenskow said.

Woodworth said that Dr. Hassan could just give his money, but then it would be gone. He wants to teach, train and empower.

Woodworth said the people they are trying to help have no way of getting loans. They are victimized by no good jobs, loan sharks and banks that won't loan.

BYU team that went and future BYU teams that go will train Nigerian/LEDF staff members how to run the organization properly, Woodworth said.

"Hassan has the vision, but doesn't have the business know how," Woodworth said.

Maughan said as he returned home to the United States he found himself asking the question, "Why am I so blessed?"

"More important is the question, 'What am I doing with what I have been blessed with? Am I helping, am I serving, am I making a difference?' True joy comes to me as I strive to reach my God-given potential by trying to help others reach theirs."

Westenskow said they got the full Nigerian experience and feel they are one step closer to setting up a program where other BYU students can participate.