

**American Jewish World Service  
Proposal to GiveWell  
Economic Empowerment in Sub-Saharan Africa  
September 2009**

**Background**

AJWS is an international development organization motivated by Judaism's imperative to pursue justice and dedicated to alleviating poverty, hunger and disease among the people of the developing world, regardless of race, religion or nationality. Through grants to grassroots organizations, volunteer service, advocacy and education, AJWS fosters civil society, sustainable development and human rights for all people, while promoting the values and responsibilities of global citizenship within the Jewish community.

Needs in the developing world continue to outstrip the resources that national governments and international agencies have made available. Nearly three billion people live on less than \$2 per day, the majority of them women. Life-expectancy is 51 years in the least developed countries (compared to 76 in richer nations), with 11 million children dying before age five -- most of preventable diseases. The human rights of millions of men, women and children are violated daily -- cruelly, often casually, and almost always with impunity.

**AJWS Grantmaking – Healing One Community at a Time**

AJWS provides flexible, long-term, direct financial support to local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in five areas: Sustainable Livelihoods and Development; Community Health; Education for All; Community Engagement in Conflicts and Emergencies; and Community Voice: Civil and Political Participation. Based on regional and country strategies, AJWS empowers NGOs to implement their own visions and plans for development and social change. We target grassroots communities that are working to create a just and equitable world where human rights are universally recognized, where poverty, discrimination and violence no longer exist, and where individuals are free to flourish and live their lives with dignity. AJWS's grantmaking is guided by the following principles:

- Grassroots organizations are best placed to envision, articulate and implement their own plans for the development of their communities and countries.
- Community development cannot take place when human rights are denied. AJWS's work is guided by the values and norms that are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- Women are critical drivers of community development and change; community life cannot truly flourish when women are not fully empowered to resist gender-based violence and oppression.
- Marginalized communities that are vulnerable to poverty and human rights violations are powerful agents of change and development when mobilized from within.

The majority of AJWS grants are multi-year, range from \$3,000 to \$30,000 and are made to NGOs with yearly budgets of less than \$200,000 and few (if any) other sources of support. In particular, AJWS supports fledgling organizations – often in impoverished communities and marginalized populations – that many funders overlook, stays with them for years, and links them to larger movements and additional sources of funding when possible.

### **Building Sustainable Livelihoods in Sub-Saharan Africa**

AJWS supports grassroots organizations that promote environmental and economic sustainability, fair labor practices and a dignified standard of living for all. AJWS supports partners that promote sustainable livelihoods through strategies such as strengthening workers' cooperatives, supporting sustainable agriculture and biodiversity, micro-credit initiatives, ensuring food security and land and resource rights, and promoting slum and urban development.

AJWS's sustainable agricultural initiatives provide families and entire communities with vital technical and material resources for improving nutrition and increasing income generation. They also enable rural farming communities to adapt and survive in the face of challenges to their livelihoods, including globalization, commercialization of food production and climate change. By implementing new farming techniques, better production and distribution methods, and by organizing agricultural cooperatives and opening new markets, AJWS-supported projects deliver vital technical and material resources to families and communities.

These initiatives also teach environmentally sound practices, and create an opportunity for marginalized groups, such as women, to hone skills that allow for economic self-sufficiency, as well as help them obtain control of the land they work through a better understanding of their legal rights. Many of AJWS's Sustainable Livelihoods and Development initiatives target women. Although they are far more likely than men to be poor, malnourished and illiterate, and are often prohibited from owning land, having bank accounts or receiving an education, women are the primary drivers of social change in the developing world. Focusing on women and girls creates a multiplier effect that benefits entire communities: women who are educated, trained and provided with economic resources are able to earn a better living for themselves and their families.

For example, AJWS supports the following innovative economic empowerment projects in Sub-Saharan Africa (a full list of Sustainable Livelihoods and Development grants in this region is attached).

#### ***Liberian Rural Women Association (LIRWA), Liberia Empowering Rural Women Through Vocational Training; \$6,000***

LIRWA was founded in 1998 to enhance the living standards of women who migrated from rural areas to escape the protracted impact of the long succession of civil wars that have affected the country since the 1980s. These women struggle to survive in the capital city of Monrovia by running small businesses at the market. The "market women" traditionally receive little support to capitalize on the income-generating potential of their businesses; they are typically illiterate and cannot afford to take out high interest loans offered by the government. AJWS has partnered with LIRWA to provide affordable microcredit options to 50 market women. The organization is also building the skills of the 50 project

participants to undertake alternative livelihood activities such as soap-making, tailoring and food preservation to help broaden the women's skills and diversify their sources of revenue.

***Self-Help Initiative for Sustainable Development (SHIFSD), Liberia  
Innovative Micro Credit and Education Project; \$15,000***

The SHIFSD was founded in November 2000 to increase access to education and income for Liberian refugees in Ghana. In 2008, a combination of factors, including a return to peace in Liberia and massive political pressure in Ghana, prompted the large scale return of Liberian refugees to their home country. Due to this shift, the SHIFSD has relocated its headquarters from Ghana to southeast Liberia where many of the former refugees from the Ghanaian camps are now resettling. With AJWS's support, the organization is providing microcredit loans and entrepreneurial skills training and well as training in basic health and nutrition, hygiene, literacy and numeracy to 150 women and youth. Some of the participants are receiving microcredit loans to initiate income-generating activities.

***Kilili Self-Help Project (KSHP), Kenya  
Women-Led Biointensive Farmer Training; \$30,000***

KSHP sponsors local farmers to attend biointensive agriculture training workshops at the Manor House Agricultural Centre (MHAC) in western Kenya. Biointensive agriculture techniques conserve soil fertility and increase food production through low-cost, chemical-free methods, thereby strengthening food security and environmental health. KSHP promotes the use of these techniques by supporting women graduates of MHAC to train women-led farming groups in their communities. This year, KSHP is supporting the training of 10 new women-led groups, reaching nearly 3,000 farmers, as well as providing technical assistance to groups trained in previous years. The project assists women to achieve food security and economic self-reliance, and promotes the empowerment of women in their communities.

***GREEN Senegal  
Techno-Agriculture Innovation for Poverty Alleviation; \$27,000***

Over the last few years, AJWS has funded a project that has increased the agricultural output of 60 farmers who were trained on the maintenance and management of the family drip-by-drip irrigation system. These successes have resulted in several international organizations replicating the project and the Senegalese government incorporating best practices into its food security programs. Currently, GREEN is strengthening the capacity of local farmers to commercialize their products and maximize their revenues. The organization helps farmers create a marketing and commercialization strategy, and equips beneficiaries with computers to track data on production and trade. The project also provides trainings in business management, establishing a food drying unit and digging manure pits to increase soil fertility. Sixty percent of the beneficiaries from this project are women-headed households.

***Afrique Enjeux (Africa Issues), Senegal  
Reduction of Socio-economic Vulnerability of Women; \$25,000***

Afrique Enjeux, founded in 2002, aims to contribute to peacebuilding in the conflict-affected region of Casamance through poverty reduction and building the capacity of communities to engage in

development efforts. With funding from AJWS, Afrique Enjeux will buy agricultural equipment and supplies to establish a market garden and provide 30 women caretakers of HIV/AIDS orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) with technical assistance to begin the production of cash crops for income-generation. Market gardening, which entails the intense production of high-value crops, will give these women the potential to earn income from just three acres of land. The same women will also receive literacy training along with financial and business management courses. Participants will have access to micro-credit loans that will enable them to engage in a small business related to the market gardening activities. Afrique Enjeux will also establish a rotating group-savings fund. Each of the women will contribute to this fund monthly, and will be able to draw upon it to finance the growth and expansion of the garden initiative.

## **Monitoring and Evaluation**

AJWS undergoes a rigorous process of due diligence in determining which grantees to support; once we begin a partnership, that rigor is applied to our monitoring process as well. In addition to the financial accountability that is built into our systems, we also regularly visit our grantees and conduct extensive interviews with important stakeholders (e.g., staff, boards, organizational leaders and community members) to obtain a full sense of the partner's work and its achievements. At the beginning of a grant, partners lay out their plan for their work and their indicators of success. At the end of the grant cycle, they provide an extensive report that details how well they did in achieving their goals. We are currently in the process of working with a monitoring and evaluation consultant to complete a tailored data management system that will allow us to capture the complexities and thoroughness of our work.

AJWS also provides capacity building grants that allow the partner to hire external expertise or take a training that builds the organization's own ability to do its work. Where appropriate, AJWS provides financial support for independent, external evaluations.

Our approach is one that is fully committed to helping community-based organizations succeed. In those—typically rare—situations where an organization does not appear to be making progress in good faith, we terminate the relationship and commit to finding organizations that can make a significant positive impact in their communities. AJWS recently added two in-country consultants to increase AJWS's presence in the regions in which we work, and now have local representatives in 10 countries. These individuals have improved AJWS's monitoring and evaluation capacity on the ground, while allowing us to maintain low in-country overhead costs.

As of December 2008, more than half of our grantees have been visited by a staff or country consultant in the previous year and 64% have undergone a formal evaluation in the previous two years. Additionally, AJWS identified a consulting firm to begin the process of expanding and developing indicators for evaluating and documenting the impact of our grantmaking.

## **Conclusion**

These are just a few examples of AJWS's efforts to empower the most marginalized and vulnerable communities that are suffering the ravages of poverty. As we continue our economic empowerment grantmaking in Sub-Saharan Africa during these uncertain times, we are especially grateful to GiveWell

for the opportunity to submit this proposal. We hope that GiveWell will consider making a generous grant to AJWS in 2009 to support this vital and compelling work.