



An Introduction to Village Care International, Inc.

*Village Care International helps African communities
find the answer within themselves*



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The Plight of Africa

Remote African villages in Sub Saharan Africa have been devastated by prolonged poverty. The result has been devastating wars, disease such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic, malnutrition, and finally hopelessness.

In Nigeria, where Village Care works in almost 30 villages, the average life expectancy is 46.6 years, compared to the average US life expectancy, which is nearly twice that. As only half of the population of Nigeria has access to potable water and appropriate sanitation, disease rates are high. 2.9 million children and adults were living with HIV at the end of 2005. Approximately 8.6 million children in Nigeria have lost one or both parents due to all causes, with 930,000 of them having lost one or both parents due to AIDS. (UNDP 2007)

Helping to explain these desperately high mortality rates are figures on national income, and economic security. 92.4% of Nigerians live on less than \$2 a day. This low income decreases access to crucial resources, like clean water, education, health care, food, and public sanitation services. (UNDP 2007)

Africa is currently in a poverty trap (Sachs 2005). There are no navigable waterways in Africa, hindering trade and resulting in high transport costs. The western market is virtually cut off from Africa by the Sahara desert. As a result of poor market conditions and high transport costs, individuals are unable to succeed in business, resulting in low income, and virtually no savings.

The International Community has invested billions of dollars into almost every sector of Africa. The result has been sparse infrastructure, and communities that rely on aid to survive.

Village Care International takes a different approach. By relying on the ideas of the community and minimizing outside resources to education and information previously inaccessible to rural villages, we encourage individuals to use their own resources to care for those most affected by poverty, disease and despair. We have seen communities rise up and mobilize around their children.



The Village Care Approach

Village Care International, Inc. mobilizes communities to care for their most vulnerable members, orphan and widows. We facilitate African communities finding the answer within themselves. Using our *Empowerment –Change Model*: a four stage program, we work with communities to mobilize and advance sustainable change in remote, rural African villages.

By targeting the most vulnerable members of African villages, orphans and widows, we can encourage communities to meet and discuss solutions to their local problems. Every community will mobilize around the idea that all children, in particular orphans and vulnerable children, ought to be **safe, healthy, living in a loving home, in school and succeeding, and respected in their communities.**

Empowerment Change Model

The Empowerment Change Model ultimately improves the quality of life for all village members because they rely on themselves to help their children. The Village Care emphasis on African self reliance encourages the development of healthy and dynamic communities, and energized and hopeful individuals. The model is initiated in communities by VCI African Staff and sustained by African volunteers.

The program is initiated with training that asks village community members to **use the resources they have on hand** to implement 5 core practices necessary for children to thrive: sanitation, nutrition, health care, education and economic security.

Community members dialogue and organize groups through a process known as “Open Space”. This is a community planning session where individuals agree to projects in their homes and within the community that create improved sanitation, nutrition, health care, education, and economic security.

In addition, the villages organize a Village Care Leadership Committee that helps support ongoing maintenance of the home and community practices and also registers 20 of the most vulnerable children within the village for help.

The children and their families are provided with additional and specific support by the larger village, such as food donations, clothes donations, resources for shelter, etc. to ensure positive outcomes for the orphans.

Once the community implements the Empowerment-Change program with no external resources for 6 months, they are eligible to apply for funding from Village Care International, Inc. if they require additional capital to complete key projects. These could include: expansion of a community garden, building materials for the homes of families caring for orphans, development of a fund to support school fees for orphans.

Village Care has seen communities come together, pool their own resources, and buy clothing for orphans, loan money for small businesses (and the loans were repaid!), organize community sanitation networks, after school reading programs, and more. It is incredible to see what these communities can do when they are given the opportunity to discuss. Below is a 'sticky wall', a trademark of Village Care's Open Space Discussions. It is used to help organize community members so they can discuss issues that are important and relevant to them.





A Village Care Success Story: The Women of Nyamusi, Kenya

Village Care International, Inc. (VCI) believes that local issues are solved with local solutions. We encourage African communities to find their answers within themselves with the resources they have on hand. VCI recruits American volunteers to travel in teams of 5 to the villages that request support on specific projects they have initiated. Below is story that demonstrates the the infinite potential for human achievement when groups rely on themselves.

In the summer of 2006, the VCI National Director in Kenya asked if the American VCI staff could organize an American team of volunteers to work with some of the women in Nyamusi, his home village. These women were interested in implementing VCI practices, but they were not certain of where to start. VCI staff in America organized a small team of American women to travel to Nyamusi, introduce the idea of a women's group, and assist in facilitation of the early sessions. Given the VCI focus on indigenous leadership, the American team leader sought approval from the women prior to their trip. She communicated through the Kenya National Director.

The women of Nyamusi were excited by the opportunity to meet alone as a group without their husbands. In many rural African communities, leadership roles are relegated only to men and women do not often get the chance to establish and develop their own leadership skills. When given this opportunity to engage with each other around a common problem, the natural leadership abilities of the participants in the Nyamusi Women's Discussion Group began to emerge. By working as a united group that was directed only by the participants, the Nyamusi women were very capable of putting in place plans to improve the outcomes of their own children, as well as the outcomes of other vulnerable children living in the village.

The original group began in 2006 with 11 women; by 2007 2 of the original group members were ready to initiate their own groups. Between 2006 and 2007, the original women's group accomplished the following: (See next page)

Women's Success Story Continued...

1. Initiated and maintained a community garden that they shared with the group members as well as with widows in Nyamusi that did not have enough food to feed their children.
2. Each had donated a shilling to a common fund. The fund grew until they were able to have a fund large enough to allow them to put hand washing stations just outside of each of their homes. After they had taken care of their own homes, they were saving to offer the service to other families in the village caring for vulnerable children.
3. They are making business plans and working to find the resources to fund the initiation of a sewing business that could be jointly run among all members of the group that committed resources to the endeavor.
4. The original Nyamusi Women's Group has expanded to include 50 women and they are continuing to grow. As the group expands, the women are better prepared to design new projects as each new recruit brings to the group a novel set of skills.

Each of these projects is being implemented with no external resources from VCI and each further improves nutrition, sanitation, education, health care awareness, and economic development in Nyamusi. In turn, these practices increase the likelihood that even the most vulnerable children in the village will be able to be safe, healthy, living in a loving home, going to school and succeeding, and contributing to their community.

Below you can see a woman from Nyamusi caring for one of the children registered in the Village Care Program. These women use their own resources to facilitate change.





VCI Principles

VCI applies a business model to community mobilizing. The organization emphasizes principles also evident in successful businesses. Community self reliance is a key goal of VCI.

1. **Equal Vesting:** Outside resources must be matched with community resources. All communities initiate projects with their own resources.
2. **Indigenous Leadership:** Only Africans can develop realistic solutions for Africa's problems.
3. **Self Sufficiency:** Projects must be sustainable prior to external resources being invested to support implementation of the 5 core practices.





VCI Achievements

- VCI operates currently in 4 Sub-Saharan African countries: Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, & Tanzania.
- Currently, the VCI 4-stage, Empowerment-Change program is being implemented in 74 villages.
- The majority of the villages are in Stage 1 (They have completed Outcomes, Practices, and Open Space Training and formed Village Leadership Committee).
- Each village registers 20 of its most vulnerable children for targeted assistance during Stage 2. During the 2008 calendar year, a total of 230 children were registered for assistance in first quarter.
- Intended outcome: By end of 4th quarter of 2008, minimum of 920 children registered and maximum of 1480. (Total number will vary based on how many villages progress beyond Stage 1.)
- Minimum of 100 families per village involved in the key activity of Stage 1- Outcomes, Practices, & Open Space training. Each family is supported to initiate the practices immediately at home, impacting a minimum of 7400 children across the 4 countries where VCI is operating.
- Introduced the Village Care program to 26 orphanages in Kenya and 2 in Nigeria. Training for 25 administrators to initiate Empowerment-Change model within their orphanages is planned in Kenya for July, 2008.
- Provided funding for crisis food aid to 3,450 orphans in Kenya following presidential election violence in January, 2008.



VCI Costs

- Village Care International operates currently on an annual budget of \$789,500. Of this, 13% is spent on administrative costs; the rest is dedicated to direct program support.
- Between 920-1480 extremely vulnerable orphans will be registered for tailored care by the end of 2008. Based on these projections, the cost per orphan that is *registered by* the VCI Leadership Committees will range from \$45-\$71 per month.
- In addition to the *most vulnerable* children in the villages, an additional 7,400 children will be positively impacted because of their communities renewed and dynamic focus on sanitation, nutrition, health care, education, and economic development. **This translates into \$9 per child, per month.**