

# UNIFEM

United Nations  
Development Fund For Women

## WOMEN ARE WINNERS WITH COMPUTER TRAINING IN ZIMBABWE

Gladys Mukaratirwa is determined to improve the livelihood of women in Bonda, the small village in the mountainous Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe where she lives. And now that she knows how to use a computer and go on-line she feels more confident in her project's success.

In 1992 Gladys, a teacher at an all-girls school, teamed up with Angelica Freymuiller and created the Bonda Women Arts and Crafts Center.

The Center employs 33 women from the village who are shareholders as well as workers. Together they produce batiks, baskets, sculptures and fabrics and sell them to tourists who come to the nearby nature reserves.

Africans represent 13% of the world population, but only one percent of internet users globally.

"The Center is the only source of employment and sustainable income for many of the rural women in the area," says Gladys. "Most of them lack an education and at the Center they are able to benefit from job training and to receive money for the work they produce during their training." Initially the Center thrived but the growing political and economic instability in

Zimbabwe drove tourists away and sales began to flounder. "Things were so bad that I thought the entire project would collapse," says Gladys.

It was then that Gladys learned about the WINNER project. WINNER, which stands for Women in the New Network for Entrepreneurial Reinforcement, is a 3.5 year-long global project supported by UNIFEM and DEVNET-TIPS, a business information provider for small and medium size enterprises. The project provides training on information and communication technologies (ICTs) to women entrepreneurs, teaching them basic computer literacy, e-commerce, international trade, gender issues, export procedures, entrepreneurial management and fair trade. Since its inception in 1999, the project has trained 2,267 women in Ecuador, Albania, Romania, Nepal, Philippines, China, Bangladesh and Zimbabwe.

For Gladys, learning how to operate a computer and use the Internet was the fulfillment of a life dream. "For years I heard and read about the work you could do with computers," she says. "But I never had the opportunity to use one until I went to the WINNER training sessions. It was an incredible experience and I enjoyed every minute of it."

Gladys Mukaratirwa is a WINNER.  
Photographer: Mr. L. Marozova  
Zimbabwe, 2000



By learning how to use ICTs, Gladys was able to save the Bonda Women Arts and Crafts Center. The WINNER project provided her with training, as well as a computer for her business. With UNIFEM's help Gladys has logged on to cyberspace to find new clients for the Center's products.

"I was now able to browse the Internet and contact potential clients and partners around the world via email," says Gladys. "Without the WINNER project I would not have had access to these tools."

Soon enough the Arts and Crafts Center was exporting batiks to the Netherlands and turning up a profit for its shareholders. Eager to share her newly acquired knowledge of ICTs, Gladys went on to train 20 of the Center's women.

"Teaching the women was spiritually rewarding," she says. "I think that access to information helps women make choices for their day to day life and to be able to seek a better life."

With a Bonda Women Arts and Crafts Center Website up and new business partnerships looming in cyberspace, Gladys' dream of empowering the rural women of Bonda may be just one click of the mouse away.

Gladys' lack of exposure to ICTs is hardly unusual. Access to information technologies in Sub-Saharan Africa, where there are only 15 telephone lines and eight personal computers per 1,000 people (UN World's Women 2000) presents a major challenge. For women in Zimbabwe, whose literacy rates are lower than



## **WORKING FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND GENDER EQUALITY: UNIFEM'S PROGRAMMES AND PRIORITIES**

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) is the women's fund at the United Nations. It provides financial and technical assistance to innovative programmes and strategies that promote women's human rights, political participation, and economic security worldwide. UNIFEM works in partnership with UN agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to link women's issues and concerns to national, regional and global agendas.

UNIFEM was created in 1976, in response to a call from women's organizations attending the 1975 UN First World Conference on Women in Mexico City. Today, UNIFEM works in over 100 countries and has 14 Regional Programme Directors and a growing network of affiliated gender advisors and specialists in Africa, the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, Latin America and the Caribbean.

### **Implementing an empowerment framework**

UNIFEM's programme strategy is guided by an empowerment framework that is based on promoting women's rights, opportunities and capacities. Within this framework, UNIFEM focuses on three areas:

- Strengthening women's economic rights and empowering women to achieve economic security as entrepreneurs, producers and home-based workers, especially in the context of new trade agendas and technologies;
- Engendering governance and peace-building to increase women's participation in decision-making processes that shape their lives;
- Promoting women's human rights to eliminate all forms of violence against women and address the gender dimensions of HIV and AIDS.

UNIFEM works to transform women's lives by ensuring that commitments made by the international community to achieve gender equality are fulfilled. These include the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women. Within the UN system, UNIFEM works to ensure that gender concerns are taken into account in all levels of programming and in efforts towards the fulfillment of the Millennium Development Goals.

### **For more information, contact:**

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