

SITI Training

Interview With Ocan Christopher

1. Why did Invisible Children create the SITI program?

Invisible Children created it to address the needs of men and women in the Bracelet Campaign, arguably the poorest people in northern Uganda. Bracelet beneficiaries live in internally displaced camps where there are little opportunities for employment. Before joining the Bracelet Campaign, the average level of monthly income for ICBC beneficiaries was approximately \$12 USD (20,000 USh) per month. Furthermore, at least 95% of the beneficiaries are illiterate; they can't read, write, and use simple arithmetic. The SITI program was developed to address these needs through three objectives:

A. Create a strategy for poverty reduction among the bracelet beneficiaries, their family members, and the surrounding community. Poverty in IDP camps in northern Uganda is rampant. Most residents are peasant farmers and have been without their land for two decades. The tenure of displacement, poverty and dependency has left a culture of consumption within the camps. Money earned is spent quickly on overdue necessities and delayed desires. Most camp residents have not had training or experience in managing personal finances and their financial futures. SITI training was created to enable the beneficiaries to leverage their current income for future success so as to enjoy a sustainable life change.

B. Enhance the ability of the bracelet beneficiaries to exploit the available, untapped resources found in the region. Northern Uganda has abundant unused resources and opportunities such as rich, abundant land, markets, etc. SITI training helps beneficiaries scan the environment and take advantage of the unexplored possibilities.

C. Establish sustainable income sources to outlast the ending of the ICBC program. Like any project, the Bracelet Campaign will end, and so the training must enhance the capacity of the beneficiaries to provide in the long-term for themselves and their families. Without SITI training, Invisible Children beneficiaries would only have the wages they make from the bracelet making, but with the training they learn to create sustainable income-generating ventures.

2. How was the program created?

We began creating the program by outlining a training curriculum. This process involved clearly laying out the topics, as well as establishing the general and specific objectives of each topic. Topics were selected carefully, and were meant to address issues concerning savings and investment. After the outlining process, a detailed curriculum was developed in English. Here, each topic was written in depth to ensure that all of the specific objectives were achieved. Areas such as business assimilation and participant activities were specified. When the above were completed, the curriculum was translated in the local language (Luo), as all the trainees speak and understand Luo. Finally, a training schedule was made for bracelet makers and their spouses.

3. When did training begin? How long does it take for a person to complete the training program?

The training began in June of 2007 at three of the six sites - Koro, HEALS, and Awer. The length of the training varies because of factors like different educational backgrounds among the participants, the number of sessions taught in a week, and other unforeseen circumstances that may interfere with training. Holding all other factors constant however, it takes six to eight months to finish the curriculum, with participants being trained for three hours a week.

4. What topics does the training program cover?

The topics that the training program cover are as follows:

- Poverty and its associated problems, plus possible remedies
- Savings for overcoming poverty
- Entrepreneurship skills for overcoming poverty
- Personal finance planning for overcoming poverty
- Budgeting and saving for current and future needs
- Using savings to make more money
- Sources of business funding
- The proper use of loans
- Identifying business opportunities
- Estimating capital and costs
- Keeping records of business finances
- Marketing
- Customer care

5. How is the curriculum taught? What activities are conducted to train the beneficiaries?

The curriculum is taught in triangulated methods that include the following:

- **Brainstorming:** Here, the trainer asks about some key concepts/terms while participants are allowed to voice their opinions. After gathering their perspectives, the trainer then merges their ideas together with his/hers.
- **Lectures:** This method is used for presenting actual material in a direct and logical manner or to present views on a subject.
- **Large-group discussion:** The trainer allows participants to ask questions based on their areas of difficulties, dissatisfaction, curiosity, interest, etc. The trainer then responds to these questions.
- **Small-group discussion:** Participants are divided into small groups of five to seven individuals where they share their opinions, ideas, experiences in a certain area, or solve a problem given to them. They then choose one person from their group to present to the entire class.
- **Demonstration:** The trainer presents and shows how to perform an act or to use a procedure, such as budgeting.
- **Experience sharing:** A trainer allows a person who has had experience with a particular subject to share it with the class.
- **Assignment:** The participants are able to further understand concepts by performing what they've learned. Participants are given work to do outside of the classroom and the trainer goes through each of their work and later makes correction where necessary.
- **Role-playing and simulation games**
- **Energizers:** This exercise is useful when the participants' level of attention has reduced. They are asked to perform or imitate some activities to refresh them.

6. What has the reception been to the SITI training?

Reception of the SITI training has been extremely good. There is a high number of participants, frequent feedback, and a high level of attendance.

7. What is the greatest opportunity that SITI training can provide to people in northern Uganda?

The initiation of SITI training has helped all the bracelet groups trained so far begin saving money for operating micro-finance businesses. Poverty and associated problems are the biggest challenge faced by the people of northern Uganda, and the SITI training curriculum is designed to address those issues. Another challenge that these people face is a poor culture of saving. SITI also encourages savings that people can use for their future.

8. What is the biggest challenge for SITI training?

Over 90% of the beneficiaries do not know how to read, write and calculate simple arithmetic. This is a big challenge for SITI training because without such skills, operating an income-generating activity (IGA) becomes very difficult. Concepts such as record keeping are paramount in any business venture, yet are lost if one does not know how to transcribe the records. Knowledge of simple arithmetic is also vital to establishing whether a business is earning profit or realizing loss, and lack of this ability is a big problem.

9. How is Invisible Children addressing this problem?

To coincide with the SITI training, Invisible Children is developing complimentary training in literacy and numeracy.

10. What is your favorite part about conducting training lessons?

I enjoy all the topics more or less equally. However, topics where there are role-plays and simulation games are more interesting.

11. How many beneficiaries have started businesses?

So far, SITI training has been completed at three of the six sites and all the beneficiaries trained at those sites have created a plan for at least one income-generating activity. A good number have already started operating those IGAs, and some are saving to begin business ventures soon. On a whole, 75% have started businesses and we anticipate the rest to begin their small businesses soon.

12. How will SITI training help facilitate the return and resettlement process?

One thing to note is that life in the camps has seriously limited the people of northern Uganda from available resources and viable opportunities. People lost their dignity and self esteem. SITI training is a great solution to the above problems. The training has made people realize their potential and to know the opportunities existing around them. Therefore return and resettlement is itself a great opportunity for people who received SITI training because they are now in position to use their potentials to make the best use of take advantage of the abundant untapped resources in and around northern Uganda.