



VOA News, Washington DC - International Edition with Steve Norman

JULY 29, 2014

Interview transcript with John Bronson, Senior Director for Economic Strengthening, Project HOPE

Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Mozambique

VOA Host: The global health education and humanitarian assistance organization Project HOPE has launched a program in Mozambique to improve the economic status of orphans and other vulnerable children affected by the AIDS epidemic. I spoke with Project HOPE's Senior Director for Economic Strengthening, John Bronson about the project.

Bronson: This project actually is a small activity compared to what we're doing overall in Mozambique. Project HOPE has had a lot of expertise, and experience in economic strengthening with caregivers of AIDS orphans, which constitutes the bulk of our programming activity. This particular new program is working with several local organizations to build their capacity to implement programs that involve economic strengthening, and we utilize a methodology that is referred to as Village Savings and Loan as the programmatic methodology.

VOA Host: We always talk when I get together with somebody from Project HOPE about the work you do with these local communities, and these VSL groups are an example of that in Mozambique. Correct?

Bronson: That's exactly right. It's a program approach that tries to really build capacity and help build knowledge and skills and help bring new resources to very impoverished families to help them overcome the burdens that they're facing.

Norman: And, let's talk about that. Not everyone who will be hearing this interview will know that much about Mozambique specifically. Poverty, yes we understand. AIDS, most people are fairly familiar with it. Is there anything unique about the plight of people in Mozambique?

Bronson: Well, people don't often realize that Mozambique is an extremely large country. So the government resources are being stretched across a very large geographical area with very different environments in different places. They also have come out quite some years ago from a long-term civil war. And so it does represent a lot of optimism and hope with a reasonably stable government and that they are able to build up the economy and people are able to improve their lives and recover from a disastrous past.

VOA Host: And let's talk somewhat John about households where orphans and vulnerable children reside. Life has got to be difficult under the best circumstances there. You're going to specifically help them how?

Bronson: We're going to try to help them find ways to generate more income as well as to improve the health and the vitality of their households. We utilize a methodology that involves bringing a variety of resources. We build leadership; we build group dynamics. The participants help set up what they think they can make in terms of the savings contribution, a very small amount of money, on a regular basis. And as they begin to operate the group and bring that money together, they can begin to re-lend it to each other in case one of the participants has an idea to do a small income generation activity. Often times they have no ability to access formal financial capital from banks who would never lend to women in many cases - certainly not in rural areas. So, this gives them access to some resources to generate some income, and as they pool up these funds they're able to utilize them in ways to help them benefit their household whether it might be to improve or put windows on a house that has no windows, or to buy more nutritious foods for their family, or to pay for school fees they were unable to pay for before so the children go and access education. So, there's a variety of ways to help them, but mostly through the capacity of the local people to find solutions to their problems.

VOA Host: How many households are you expecting to reach?

Bronson: Well, this particular project is not all that large. But I believe about 1,400 households that we are working with. But in Mozambique, Project HOPE is currently working with over 20,000 households in other programs as well using this same methodology.

VOA Host: Let's just talk briefly about that. Obviously, a large country as you said, what else does Project HOPE do in Mozambique?

Bronson: Well, this is the predominance of our activities. We also do what's called parenting education where we have developed a methodology to help those that are caring for orphans in the home, to become better parents. How to advise them about prevention of HIV/AIDS, know when to access health care when it's important, being able to understand the rights of children, helping children who have experienced the loss of a parent and dealing with their bereavement. And, other ways to basically try and help the children become productive and well-functioning members of their society.

VOA host: John Bronson is the Senior Director for Economic Strengthening for Project HOPE. For more information on Project HOPE, check out their website at www.projecthope.org.