



Powerful Information

grassroots international development

Who We Are & What We Do

Powerful Information is small British charity with a hands-on approach to international development. We seek to empower communities in low-income countries with the information, understanding and means to tackle poverty and discrimination and promote good health and sustainable livelihoods. We also coach and prepare UK interns/graduates for NGO work in international development. We were established in 1990; obtained charitable status in 1992; and became a charitable company limited by guarantee in 2002.

Our Approach

We work with and through local partners to understand community needs, locate appropriate information and knowhow, and then facilitate programmes that inform, engage and empower local people, especially rural women and people with disabilities. We aim to build social capital, promote social justice and raise environmental awareness.

Achievements

Over the years we have resourced and managed over 100 grassroots projects abroad, and we have helped build the capacity and operational effectiveness of dozens of indigenous groups, including six that we assisted in setting up.¹ Most of our work today is in West Africa, but for many years we also worked with NGOs and community-based organisations in deprived regions of Eastern Europe to help develop and implement grassroots projects; and we supported initiatives in Albania, Lithuania, Moldova, Romania and Ukraine. This included training over 300 teachers to think more creatively about environmental education and overseeing 80 student projects in the community — 12 projects in Romania went on to win regional or national prizes. Sadly, we had to suspend this work in early 2014 because of the difficulty in raising funds for the region.

In *Africa*, we have helped provide non-formal basic education and functional literacy for over 3,500 women and teenage girls in Sierra Leone, and education and skills-training for 130 blind men and women, including start-up kits for many, and computer training for 35 blind professionals.²

We have also helped empower nearly 500 subsistence farmers in the Volta Region of Ghana with the knowledge and skills to use chemical sprays safely and increase crop yields / quality through integrated pest management. We also supported a follow-up programme of talks on the



The main beneficiaries of our education programmes in Sierra Leone are women subsistence farmers and petty traders.



Mike Flood with Fatmata Sesay, Director of Grassroots Education & Development for Women visiting one of GEDeW's women's learning circles (Malaforia in Koinadugu).

dangers of pesticide misuse which reached over 8,000 high school students and teachers — 40% of students said they were involved in spraying but they had had no training and didn't use any form of protection. You can find more details of our work on the 'What's New?' section of our website.

Local Partners

Of course, we would achieve very little without the skills, knowledge and experience of our local partners who supervise and manage projects on the ground. They understand the local languages, culture and politics, and they know how to get things done; they also have the contacts and are known and trusted by local people. We think this form of collaboration is highly effective and enables us to get to the parts that much larger organisations often fail to reach. And being a part of an active network of committed non-governmental organisations enables us to share ideas and information and enhance the reach and impact of our work.



Working with *Vision for the Blind* and the *Sierra Leone Association of the Blind* to train blind professionals to use computers / access email [VFB; Makeni].

Human Resources

Powerful Information has a core team of three development professionals supported by local volunteers and a six-strong board. Mike Flood has a background in environmental campaigning and tertiary education; he is passionate about community development and social justice and has set up and run grassroots projects in more than a dozen countries. Jill Chinn worked as a tax inspector for 20 years before joining PI: she has twice visited Sierra Leone to monitor grassroots projects and advise on financial management. The third member of our team, Ariadna Benet Mònico, manages projects on a freelance basis: she is a former PI Project Officer and has run community projects in Albania, Lithuania, PNG and Sierra Leone.

We have a small team of volunteers, some of whom are directly involved in project work and fundraising. We also receive support from professionals from *Network Rail* through the company's volunteering scheme.

Support

Powerful Information is essentially project-funded: we raise money primarily from trusts and foundations, and from development agencies; and we also receive donations from private individuals. Over the last five years we have been awarded grants by: the *Alice Ellen Cooper Dean Charitable Foundation*, *Allan & Nesta Ferguson Charitable Trust*, *Beatrice Laing Charitable Trust*, *British Council*, *Comic Relief*, *Eleanor Rathbone Charitable Trust*, *The Environ Foundation*, *The European Union*, *Guernsey Overseas Aid Commission*, *Hilden Charitable Fund*, *Marr-Munning Trust*, *Sightsavers*, *Souter Charitable Trust* and the *Waterloo Foundation*. We would like to thank these bodies for their generous support.

Modest Overheads

We have an office in the *City Discovery Centre* in Bradwell Abbey in Milton Keynes. It is equipped with an advanced information management system that we have built ourselves over the years. We pay modest salaries and have low operational overheads (including subsidised rent); and we don't pay outside fundraisers. What this means is that the major part of the money that we raise goes directly on helping people in our target countries fight ignorance, illiteracy, poverty and discrimination. We are proud of what we have achieved over the years.

¹ These include: *Local Initiative* (Kaunas, Lithuania, 1999), *Clubul Tinerilor din Brusturoasa* in Romania (2006), and *Vision for the Blind* (Freetown, 2003), *Grassroots Education & Development for Women* (Kabala, 2008), *Education for Women* (Makeni, 2009) and *Domestic Concern for Women* (Makeni, 2013) in Sierra Leone.

² We developed the novel computer training programme on which this work was based — see article in: www.sightsavers.net/in_depth/quality_and_learning/learning/20998_insight%20plus%20dec%202013.pdf.