



Rwanda Links Up



Thanks to support from the World Bank's Post-Conflict Fund, World Links - Rwanda was officially launched by President Paul Kagame on February 11, 2003, at the Groupe Scolaire de Notre Dame du Bon Conseil in Byumba Province. During the launch, President Kagame urged all Rwandans to make learning to use computers and the Internet a priority. He referred to the vast wealth of information available to the business community, farmers, and other professionals on the Internet which could enable them to increase productivity, to develop the country and improve their welfare by, among other things, developing their knowledge base by using

computers and the Internet.

This event officially marked the initial phase of World Links' secondary school program in Rwanda, which plans to equip twenty-four secondary schools with computer labs, connect them to the Internet, and train teachers to use technology in the classroom. In the case of Rwanda, it will focus specifically on encouraging increased communication and understanding between and among Hutu and Tutsi youth, through participation in on-line collaborative learning projects. Rwandan students will also be linked up through the Internet with their peers around the world, to participate in tele-collaborative projects which focus on topics such as building cultural understanding, protecting the environment, promoting the roles and status of women in society, reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS and increasing youth civic participation. These schools also comprise the Ministry of Education's pilot program to establish "SchoolNet Rwanda".

World Links-Rwanda project will fund the investment phase of this program, with schools and surrounding communities responsible for recurring costs. The computer labs will be open to students and teachers during school hours, and to community groups and out-of-school youth during non-school hours on a fee-basis. World Links has used this model over the last five years in over twenty other developing countries (ten of them in sub-Saharan Africa). Ninety eight percent (98%) of these schools are on-line today, proof that World Links meets the "market test" of community-based sustainability.

The total cost of this project is US\$500,000, provided by the World Bank's Post-Conflict Fund (PCF). This initial financing window has leveraged additional support from USAID and a World Bank credit (approximately US\$1 million). Additional support will enable more Rwandan youth and teachers to participate in the World Links program, and to develop in-service teacher training delivered via the Internet in collaboration with the Kigali Institute for Education.

Like any program in a post-conflict country, World Links Rwanda has had its share of problems. For example, the first set of thirteen schools was to be selected through a demand-driven process which included consultation with school directors and parent-teacher associations. While efforts were made

to follow this approach, it was not possible in all cases given time, budgetary and bureaucratic constraints. Following extensive discussions with the Ministry of Education, a revised school selection process which respects the need for a participatory, demand-driven approach will be used to select the next group of eleven schools.

Secondly, the school's internal selection process for selecting participants in World Links training did not always match World Links' stated project goals. Despite World Links' focus on teachers in the first round of training, some school administrators and non-teachers chose to attend Phase I training in lieu of their teaching staff. Fortunately, this problem was quickly remedied as soon as it was brought to World Links' attention - new teachers were brought in to replace non-teachers, and recently a refresher course was hosted to compensate for the confusion in the first training sessions.

Another challenge has been transporting equipment to the chosen schools. Rwandan roads are generally in bad shape, and long-distance communication leaves much to be desired. It is difficult for sensitive electronic equipment to travel over badly maintained or non-existent roads from storage facilities in Kigali to schools in outlying villages. Furthermore, the World Links country coordinator and local teachers have difficulty corresponding with each other to troubleshoot technical problems. The unreliability of telecommunications complicates relationships with phone companies, Internet Service Providers, electricians, and other contractors. This has slowed down the process of implementing the World Links program, which is especially frustrating since efficient and creative information exchange is the ultimate goal of this work.

Thirteen schools in the country—one in each province and two in Byumba—are benefiting from the World Links program so far. Each of the thirteen schools has a computer laboratory with sixteen computers and printers. The World Links-Rwanda project will be extended to eleven more secondary schools across the country within the next six months. World Links will also soon launch a program to provide one computer in every primary school in Rwanda that has access to electricity.

The World Links-Rwanda project is in line with both the government's ICT [information and communications technology] strategy and "Vision 2020", which place emphasis on developing Rwanda into a knowledge-based economy.

World Links is an international NGO that aims to improve global understanding, educational outcomes and employment opportunities for youth in developing countries, through the use of technology and the Internet.

The PCF Occasional Notes

This PCF Occasional Note was written by Sam Carlson, WorldLinks. This occasional note series is intended to disseminate good practices, lessons learned and useful information about PCF grants. The series is edited by the PCF Secretariat within the Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction (CPR) Unit in the Social Development Department of the Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development Network of the World Bank. The views expressed in these notes are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the World Bank Group, its Executive Directors, or the countries they represent. PCF Occasional Notes are distributed widely to the World Bank staff and outside the World Bank and are also available on the CPR/PCF website (<http://www.worldbank.org/pcf>).