

Teach A Man To Fish – financially sustainable schools for entrepreneurs

Teach A Man To Fish is a UK-based NGO that promotes a new approach to education in developing countries. We believe that education is the key to tackling global poverty. At the same time we challenge traditional education as we know it. We want to eliminate the problem of limited access and poor quality of education. Our innovative model combines teaching agriculture and business skills within school-owned enterprises. It is sustainable as businesses run by the schools generate income to cover 100 percent of their operating costs, so that they don't need any external funding from governments or charities. The graduates of these schools are then equipped with the necessary skills to support themselves and their families.

■ Sustainability as a main principle

Students firstly learn the underlying concepts of business and agricultural activities alongside general education. Then during field-based classes they learn how these concepts work in practice and how to use them. Thanks to the "learning by doing" approach they gain the practical technical skills needed to master each discipline. Rotating through the school's business units, students specialise and take on greater responsibilities. Finally, they are taught how to manage financial transactions, monitor



Photo: Teach A Man To Fish

profitability, learn to market and sell their produce. At the end of this education students receive a nationally-recognised High School Degree.

The innovation that distinguishes Teach A Man To Fish from other education charities is in the approach to financial sustainability. Our schools teach business through running their own businesses. These school enterprises – from beekeeping to carpentry workshops – earn the schools money, which covers facilities and teaching costs. Over time the schools become financially self-sufficient, meaning even the poorest kids can attend for free. We call this model 'Education That Pays For Itself'.

■ The flagship school in Paraguay

The first Financially Sustainable School for Rural Entrepreneurs was created in 2002 in Paraguay by our sister organisation Fundación Paraguaya. This model is now being replicated internationally by Teach A Man To Fish as the school proves to be a practical model for the provision of high quality education in developing countries:

- Generating over 300,000 US dollars (USD) in income annually through sustainable income generation initiatives, the school is now able to cover 100 percent of its operating costs.
- The school which takes no government money, does not need to charge fees to provide a first class education to students from some of the poorest communities in the country.
- Because the quality of its teaching is so high, within two months of graduation almost every one of the students are either in good jobs, including with some of the country's leading agribusinesses; at university; or successfully running their own businesses.

The "Teach A Man To Fish" model combines teaching agricultural and business skills in a learning-by-doing approach.

In broad terms, this model is suitable in almost all other regions. However, every school will need to adapt the model to its particular market, culture and other particular requirements. For example, a school in a coastal area with marine resources would probably look very different from the school in land-locked Paraguay. Nevertheless, every school could use the same model to train successful entrepreneurs and achieve financial self-sufficiency.

The main challenge related to implementing the model is having sufficient vision and leadership; qualities which are not determined by how much money the school has at the beginning of the process. However, this too has a major effect on whether a school is able to obtain the necessary resources to start different businesses. Strongest challenges are: bias against combining education and making money, unfamiliarity with the "learning by doing" approach, lack of teachers with good experience in production or business, governments imposing their own curricula and the fact that youth are needed to work at home.

■ The role of Teach A Man To Fish

We work with partner organisations in a number of countries and implement educational projects which have the capacity to become self-funding. Once a project proposal has been accepted, we help develop and write a business plan alongside the local partner and where possible help secure sufficient funds for its implementation.

To share our knowledge and proven strategies, and to create a forum to build relationships and discuss ideas and challenges, we established the Teach A Man To Fish Member's Network. It now numbers over 1,700 education institutions and experts in more than 110 countries and is a rapidly growing forum supporting sustainable and relevant education.

To find out more, please visit www.teachamantofish.org.uk.

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