



The Gambia YMCA Youth and Technology

Introduction

In 1995, The Gambia YMCA created a Computer Training Center which trains students from the Y's Vocation Training Center in basic computer literacy. Since their inception, the Vocation Training Center and the Computer Training Center have trained 6,000 students in Microsoft® Office® applications and information technology skills. Most participants have gone on to become secretaries, data entry clerks, account clerks and sales reps. While 60 percent of program graduates are gainfully employed in the government and private sectors, a sizeable number of them are either not working or have moved to Europe for further studies.



Students learning computer skills at The Gambia YMCA School for Business and Management Studies.

Plan and methodology

In order to capitalize on the growing popularity and need for information technology education, The Gambia YMCA converted the Computer and Vocational training centers into a School of Business and Management Studies (SBMS). In addition to providing customized training courses for government and private groups, the SBMS will provide courses in information and communication technology, accountancy, business and management. Through YMCA World Service, YMCA of the USA provides financial assistance to The Gambia YMCA to help make the SBMS program a reality.

The Gambia YMCA has crafted a detailed business plan that addresses the needs for an effective launch of the new SBMS. Central to the plan is marketing and staff training. The YMCA will aggressively market the SBMS throughout the country in an effort to attract a wide array of students, while continuing to promote the services provided through its Digital Communications Studio, which also provides computer and software literacy courses. The Gambia YMCA is heavily engaged in training SBMS staff to equip them with the necessary competencies to effectively manage the teaching and administrative components of the SBMS.

Key challenges

A rapidly changing economic environment means that other business schools may spring up to compete with the SBMS. Consequently, The Gambia YMCA will have to stay ahead of the competition by offering the latest courses and facilities and keeping staff current on business and management practices. In order to accommodate an expected increase in enrollment, the SBMS may need to upgrade computer equipment and expand its facilities.

Keys to success

The SBMS's business plan will guide YMCA staff in their efforts to manage the school. The biggest key to success, however, will be the relationship that the school has had over the past six years with the United Kingdom's University of Cambridge. The SBMS will be accredited through Cambridge's International Examinations in Information Communication Technology. The accreditation by Cambridge greatly increases the marketability of program graduates in The Gambia and elsewhere in West Africa.

Achievements to date

Through its Digital Communications Studio and Computer Training Center (supported by YMCA World Service), the YMCA has trained over 5,000 Gambian youth in IT skills in the past decade. The enrollment of both schools remains high. In addition, the YMCA has successfully negotiated several training contracts with local government agencies and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

Future plans

The SBMS will cater to young Gambians who wish to upgrade their professional credentials, but who cannot afford fees and travel costs to go abroad. YMCA staff and volunteers, especially those from other African YMCA movements, will also benefit from the services offered by the SBMS. The school will serve as a catalyst for YMCAs that want to set up similar institutions.

By enrolling hundreds of ambitious young students, the SBMS will contribute greatly to the financial sustainability of The Gambia YMCA and the overall socio-economic development of the country. The launch of the SBMS is in line with the aspirations of The Gambian government's Vision 2020 whose mission is "to transform The Gambia into a financial center for the region sustained by a well-educated, trained and enterprising population."

testimonial

My name is Rachel Mendy. I am twenty years old and work at The Gambia YMCA's Computer Training Centre as a full-time Computer Lecturer. I enrolled at the YMCA Computer Training Centre in June 2004 to study The University of Cambridge ICT Diploma (Standard Level) on a part-time basis. I completed the course in December 2004. In August 2005, I was selected as a junior mentor for the YMCA Youth Computer Summer Program. I taught kids from the ages of 6 – 18 basic computer skills in Microsoft Word, Excel, Database and Internet Navigation.

Since joining the YMCA in October 2005 as a full-time staff, I have developed more skills on the job in areas such as Desktop Publishing and Graphic Design. My job entails marketing our center's activities, undertaking correspondence and creating brochures. We recently completed this year's summer program where the kids learned to use open source software which we shall showcase on our website this September. At age 20, I am one of the bright examples of young Gambians that have benefited from the services The Gambia YMCA and I am so proud to work there now.

Visit The Gambia YMCA Web site at www.ymca.gm

