



Echoes From Ajegunle



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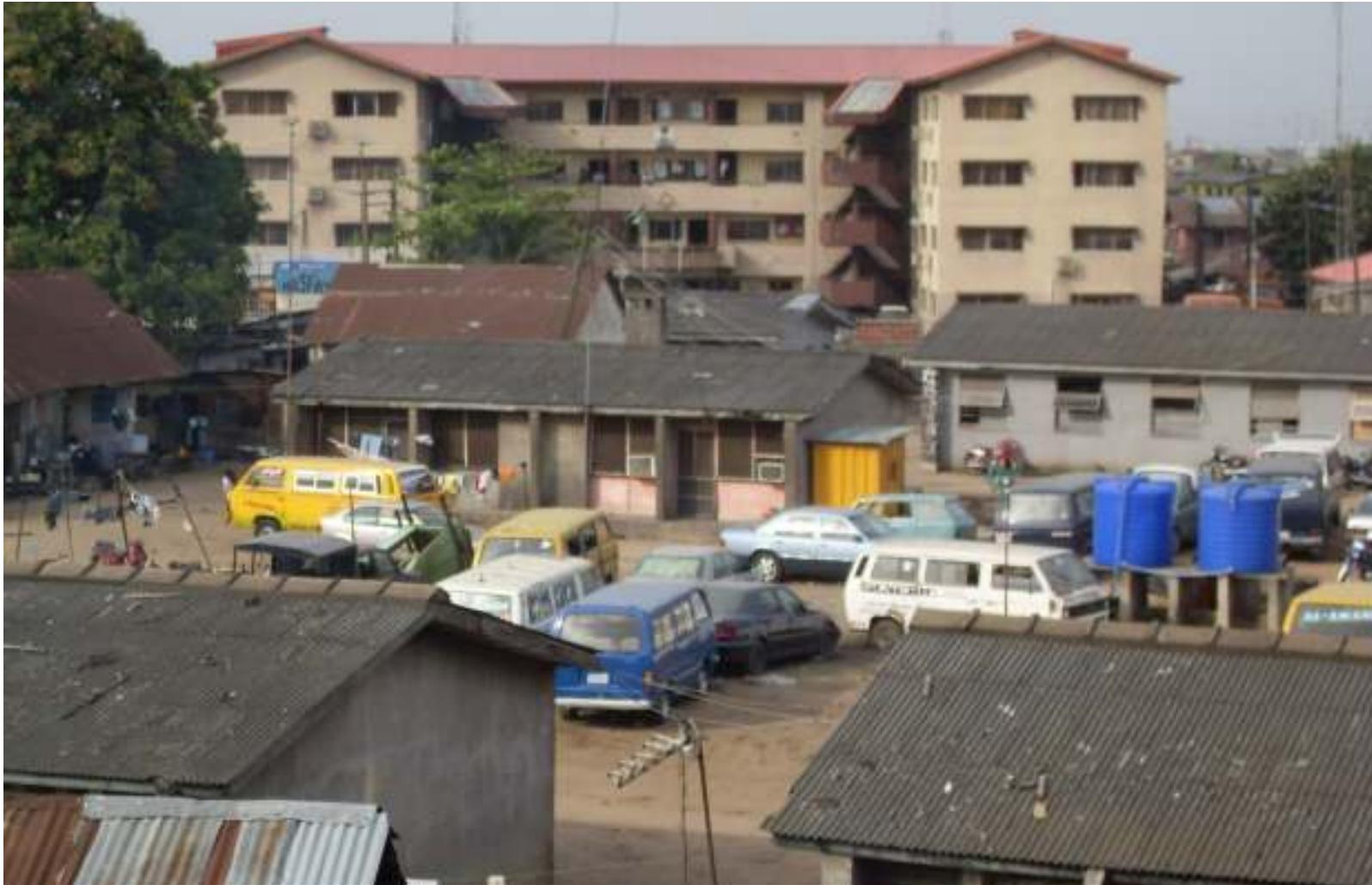


About Ajegunle.org

Ajegunle.org seeks to create better livelihoods – through ICT opportunities, entrepreneurship training, short-term internships, *Graduate Loan Scheme* – for young people in Nigeria's underserved areas. We invite you to view the project video at www.ireport.com/docs/DOC-14359. Deborah, like many other young people in Nigeria's most popular slum, was not sure of what tomorrow held for her. Now, she works with the First City Monument Bank, thanks to her participation in the Ajegunle.org project. James, another project participant, grew his business to one that now grosses an average turnover of N50,000 (\$338) every month after the training. We are working towards the replication of the idea beyond Ajegunle, and are also keen on establishing the first *Innovation Centre*.

The *Innovation Centre* will serve as a knowledge hub where more youth from the community can be empowered for the world of work. It will serve the purposes of *training* (providing a space for the Ajegunle.org training program and a centre for the advancement of workplace preparedness for Ajegunle's youth), *incubation* (providing workspaces for the entrepreneurs that we train so that they can overcome the infrastructure barrier and have a place where they can walk into and work to provide their services towards income generation and wealth creation) and *service provision* (providing a place where community members can get relevant ICT-based services, as provided by our graduates who will benefit from immediate employment opportunities while they in turn provide the centre with low-cost manpower).

Ajegunle.org is an initiative of **Paradigm Initiative Nigeria**, a social enterprise that connects young people with ICT-enabled opportunities. This eBook chapter, *Polishing the gold in Ajegunle*, tells the second set of stories of Ajegunle.org graduates – the people who prove that what we do is worth every investment made. To read the first chapter, *Stories of transformed lives*, please download from PIN's website at www.pinigeria.org/download/ajechoes.pdf. Thank you!



Commonwealth Foundation

The Commonwealth Foundation. A Resource for Civil Society and a Voice for Change.

The Commonwealth Foundation is an intergovernmental organisation, resourced by and reporting to Commonwealth governments, and guided by Commonwealth values and priorities.

The Commonwealth Foundation's mandate is to strengthen civil society in the achievement of Commonwealth priorities - democracy and good governance, respect for human rights and gender equality, poverty eradication and sustainable, people-centred development, and to promote arts and culture.

The Foundation continues to serve the broad purposes for which it was established as written in the Memorandum of Understanding:

"The purposes and areas of interest of the Foundation will be the administration of funds for increasing interchanges between Commonwealth organisations of the skilled or learned professions or skilled auxiliary occupations in order to maintain and improve standards of knowledge, attainment and conduct; and between non-governmental organisations of a voluntary rather than a strictly professional character throughout the Commonwealth. The Foundation's areas of interest will also extend to include culture, information and the media, rural development, social welfare and the handicapped, and the role of women."

The Commonwealth Foundation has provided a grant for Paradigm Initiative Nigeria to send staff and two Ajegunle.org graduates to the eLearning Africa conference in Zambia. This publication was made possible by the grant and we deeply appreciate the foundation's support. The two Ajegunle.org graduates will tell their stories at the conference between May 26 and 28, 2010.



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CHAPTER I:

Stories of transformed lives





Emmanuel Maduforo

Emmanuel heard about Ajegunle.org through his Local Government officials and a friend. He is glad he joined the program because it afforded him the opportunity to pick up computing skills and to also learn more about converting his business interests into reality. "It was a great and wonderful experience and my key take-away from the program was new knowledge about entrepreneurship", Emmanuel says of the training program. After completing his training, he benefited from the internship scheme and was also able to train other young people in his community. He added, "...my parents are very happy that Ajegunle.org has increased my skills in all areas of life, and it's also a stepping stone for my career."





Esther Olatunde

Esther joined the program in March 2008, after completing secondary school education in July 2007. The rather shy young woman had no knowledge about computers before that time but she has now become extremely comfortable – and productive – with computers, based on the lessons she picked up during the Ajegunle.org training. After her own training, Esther extended the knowledge she acquired to 6 other people – two of whom were her siblings – as part of the *relay training* scheme of the program. She completed 4 months of internship with UK Trade & Investment (UKTI) at the UK Deputy High Commission, Lagos, before clinching a full-time job at the privately-run Terminal 2 of the *Murtala Mohammed Airport* in Lagos. Hers is another example of the huge impact that the program has had on participants, most of whom are now a pride to their family and community. Esther's next plan is to study for a bachelor's degree in Computer Science – a dream she says was helped along by her experience during the Ajegunle.org training exercise.





Famous Onokurefe

Famous joined the training program in 2007, just after graduating from secondary school, and his desire to undergo formal training in computing was met when he was selected for the Ajegunle.org program. His parents were initially skeptical of the training because of the involvement of foreign volunteer trainers (*Korean Internet Volunteers*), but Famous was quick to find the exposure to a different culture quite revealing. Upon graduation, he was very comfortable with computers and also learnt a lot during the sessions on entrepreneurship – especially discussions on networking and marketing plans which he says will richly help him in his future pursuits. He trained 5 other young people in Ajegunle, including his younger brother and another young person who is a graduate of Chemical Engineering. After his training, Famous joined UKTI at the UK Deputy High Commission, Lagos, for a brief internship stint. While at UKTI, he applied for a full-time opening at the UK High Commission in Abuja, and according to him, “I had my first experience of air transportation when I was invited for the interview in Abuja, and I must say that being employed at such an international institution changed my life!” After 4 months of paid employment at the High Commission, Famous chose to pursue a bachelor’s degree in *Medical Biochemistry* at Delta State University. He spent about a month, during the period when Nigerian university teachers embarked on a nationwide strike, to add value and earn more money at UKTI – where he initially started out as an intern.





Funke Alao

Funke completed her secondary school education in 2005 and worked as a distributor for a consumer goods company for a while. While seeking an opportunity to improve her livelihood, she learnt about Ajegunle.org and joined the first set of students in 2007. She picked up computing skills, found the cultural exchange program with the *Korean Internet Volunteers* extremely exciting and went on to train 4 fellow residents in Ajegunle as a way of giving back to her community. Even though she delayed telling her parents about the training until PIN hosted the first *Town Hall Meeting*, her mum was visibly impressed with the impact that the program had on her – and she excitedly told her daughter's story of change in front of an audience that had PIN's partners and the *Local Government* representatives. For Funke, the sessions on entrepreneurship were extremely useful and phrases such as "ideas rule the world" and "you don't need huge funds to start your business" encouraged her to take a ₦2,000 (\$14) loan from a colleague, to start her small shared public mobile phone (telecentre) business soon after the Ajegunle.org program. She succeeded in paying up her loan after one month and soon grew the business to an asset base in excess of ₦58,000 (\$387) – recording a huge growth of 2,800% within 12 months. Funke wants to become a Chartered Accountant in the next few years.





James Onyebuchi Raphael

James joined the Ajegunle.org project in January 2009. Prior to the training, he had never used a computer and his parents were very excited about the opportunity since they did not have to cough up a huge sum for him to be able to pick up skills that will improve his livelihood opportunities. Even though James was a cobbler at the time he joined the program, he made time to join classes each day throughout the duration of the training. According to him, "the program opened my eyes to opportunities and how to take advantage of them." He is now very comfortable with computers and he found the entrepreneurship modules of the training most interesting. "Prior to the training, I never kept my books for the business and was therefore unable to make progress," said James, who now keeps his books and sets aside capital for re-investment in his business. He has been able to provide employment opportunities for young people around him through a business that now grosses an average turnover of ₦50,000 (\$338) every month. "I wish that the Ajegunle.org program would be extended to as many people as possible," he is always quick to say.





Linda Orajekwe

Once she heard about the training program through her youth group, *Uncommon Man Network*, Linda knew she had to benefit from the *Ajgunle.org* experience. She said of her computing knowledge before the training: "I knew computers had monitors and keyboards but that was all I knew." Now, she is comfortable with sending monthly reports of her pastry business which has earned her the nickname, *Chin-chin Lady*. Beyond picking up computing skills and learning about how to start and grow her small business, Linda believes her communication skills have significantly improved and that she also learnt a lot about life while on the program. "I learnt that there is no excuse in life, and that I must always reach out for more." Of her internship experience, she says, "...it is an experience I wouldn't have missed for anything, though it was quite stressful for me at the beginning because I had never worked in a corporate environment before. I was able to adapt and, on a lighter note, there was a time I thought the air conditioning unit in my office was going to make me freeze to death." Linda, whose dad couldn't hide his appreciation for the change in his daughter's life as we interviewed her, added that "*Ajgunle.org* gave me something I couldn't get from my primary and secondary school, so I will never forget this experience that has changed my life. I am glad that I was able to train friends and my elder sister after the program, and I now work as a secretary at *OkayHouse Nigeria*."





Nwanyiego Ijeh

Ego, as she is known to friends, learnt about the Ajegunle.org program through a youth group she belongs to - an organization that has been a partner on the project since inception - the *Uncommon Man Network*. She was one of the first set of students who benefited from the project and even though she only had theoretical knowledge of computing at the beginning, she is quick to describe the practical skills she picked up during the training. Those skills are now responsible for her position as an employee of the Visa Section of the UK Deputy High Commission in Lagos. Ego also found the entrepreneurial component of the training useful, along with the networking (and cultural exchange) opportunities that her set of trainees had with Korean Internet Volunteers – a group of 4 young Koreans who spent time training and networking with Ajegunle.org participants. She started her career with a four-month stint at UK Trade & Investment at the UK Deputy High Commission and the Commercial Section of the privately-run Terminal 2 of *Murtala Mohammed Airport*. Ego, who teamed up with a fellow Ajegunle.org participant to train five of her peers after she completed her own training, is also now a part-time student at the University of Lagos. She says with a smile, “my parents encouraged my participation in the Ajegunle.org program, and they have remained supportive to date.”





Taiwo Olayinka

Before his selection to the Ajegunle.org training program, Taiwo had “little knowledge” of the Internet but the training exposed him to the fundamentals of computing. He is also quick to add that sessions on using Microsoft Excel and Adobe Photoshop have proved extremely useful in his post-training life. He learnt more about the Internet and its use for “research, networking and learning more about the ICT sector” and has now continued on to learn about web development. “Whenever I sit to think about the future, I feel relaxed and my thought is always positive because of the skills that I have acquired – and the kind of network I have created”, Taiwo adds. “Anytime I now see opportunity, I smile because I know that the skills acquired and the experience I have working as an intern with DHL International and Uncommon Man Network will put me ahead of others”. His new-found confidence, like many other trainees, shone though when he said, “boldness, courage and improved communication are my major gifts from Ajegunle.org”. Taiwo now volunteers as coordinator of the Ajegunle.org Alumni Network.



Echoes From Ajegunle

CHAPTER 2:

Polishing the gold in Ajegunle





Ekanem Hope

Ekanem Hope, 21, was working as a sales representative when she picked up the registration form for Ajejunle.org in 2009 after she learnt that the program included ICT training. She says of the program, "My major achievement [through the program] is the knowledge I now have in ICT, and my passion in cake decoration. At first I didn't tell my parents because I thought that they might not approve it, but when they got to know about it they encourage me. A friend – who now knows better – had even said that I would lose the hard-earned N1,000 (\$6) I used to get the application form." She has trained 4 people, mostly friends and family. "While my present challenges include finance and meeting customers, I want to be a major force in the world of catering and fashion in the next 5 years."





Emmanuel Njoku

Emmanule Njoku was 24 when he joined the program 3 years ago. "I saw a way of adding to the information I had, how to use the ICT as a tool and also business part of it," he said of why he signed up. He also had this to say, "Right now I have been able to give back to the project by working as a volunteer, and I have also been able to enjoy better opportunities in life with my improved writing skills." He has been able to train 8 people – six friends and two family members. "Right now, what I need the most is a HDV camera and a computer, with which I will go a long way," he added. In 5 years, he wants to be a major voice Nigeria's entertainment industry and hopes "to run one of the big production outfits".





Miracle O. Ihuoma

Miracle Ihuoma had just completed secondary school education in 2007, at the age of 17, when he heard about the opportunity for training in ICT and entrepreneurship. "I was not really doing anything serious at the time but looking back now, wow, Ajegunle.org has been a blessing to me! After the training, I developed a serious entrepreneurial mindset, and ever since I have been doing businesses." He added that his family and friends are "all excited that I went through the training" and that he has been able to train people that he met at various seminars as well as friends. "In the next five years, I will be a professional psychologist and I see myself as one of the top 10% motivational speakers in Nigeria. And certainly, a millionaire."





Moses Udu

Moses Udu, 22, joined Ajegunle.org in 2008 because "it was not just a computer training program, but by people who are interested in my future, who are ready to guide me and support me towards achieving a brighter future." At the time, he was a casual worker at a company and attending evening classes in preparation for examinations. Excitedly, Moses stated that, "one of my major achievements is getting myself a laptop from the ICT training I held for other people. My family was happy seeing me training on ICT in a bank, even though I had not completed a degree program." He has trained 4 people, and has this to say about himself in 5 years: "I see myself as a graduate in of of the most respected organizations in Nigeria, and they will wait for my idea, decision and contribution before taking any major action in the organization."

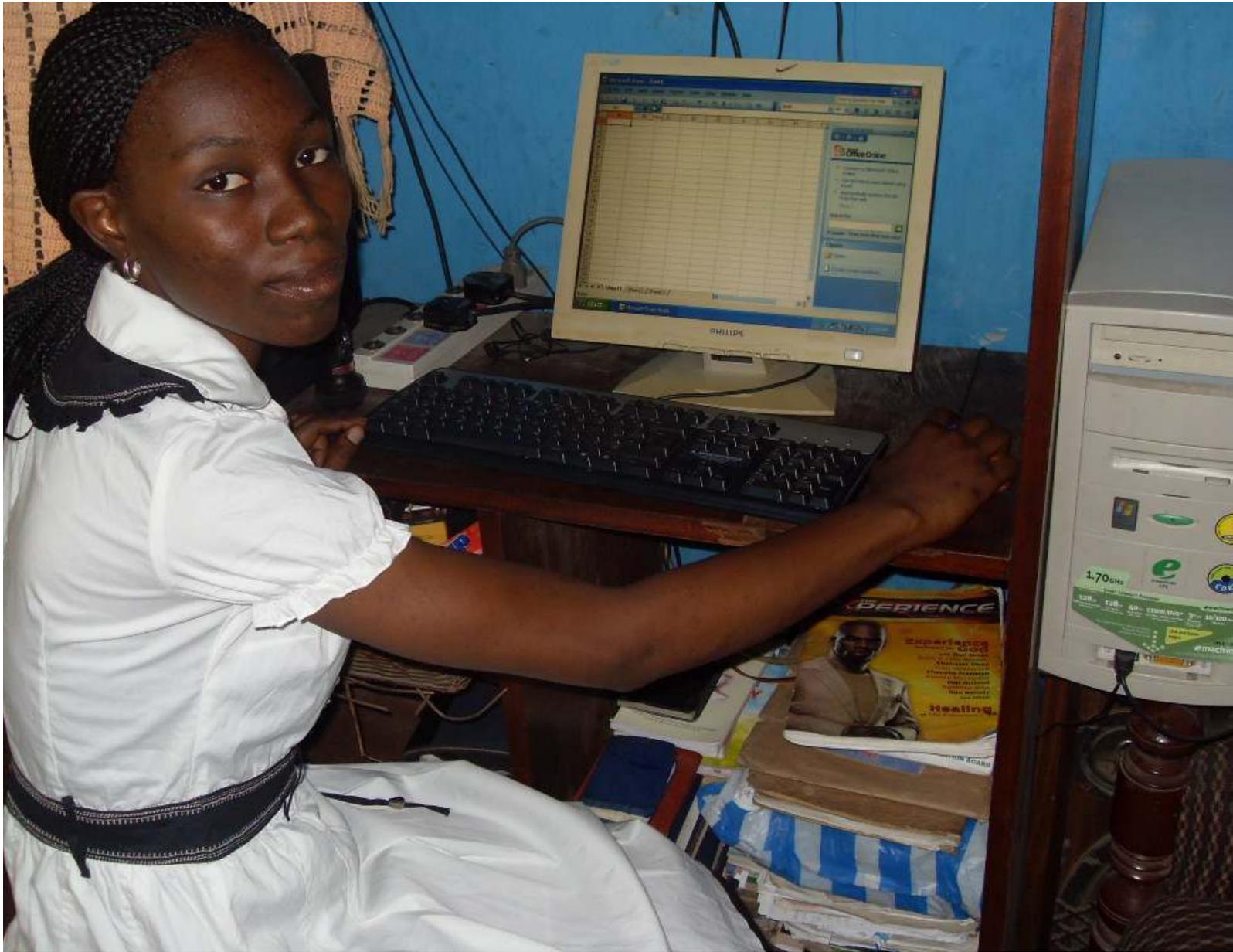




Obinna Echendu

Obinna Echendu is the newly elected Vice President of the Ajegunle.org Alumni association. He joined the class of 2007 at the age of 20, because "I saw the future from 2007, the proposed opportunity by the project and the integrity of the organizers. I have always been a business man so I was busy trying to get my business to work". He added, "Presently, I work with a reputable investment banking firm, Afrinvest West Africa, courtesy of the project. The program polished my skills of using ICT and reignited my passion." His family was very expectant and they have shown deep appreciation for the opportunities. According to him, "my friends saw the drastic change in me after the program. They did not believe me when I initially told them about the opportunities that Ajegunle.org had to offer until after the program." He has trained more than the 5 people the program requires as a minimum. "In the next five years, I'll be a brand in the Nigerian business world. By then, I would have secured a degree in the university and hopefully will be transforming the lives of young people around with an initiative like Ajegunle.org."

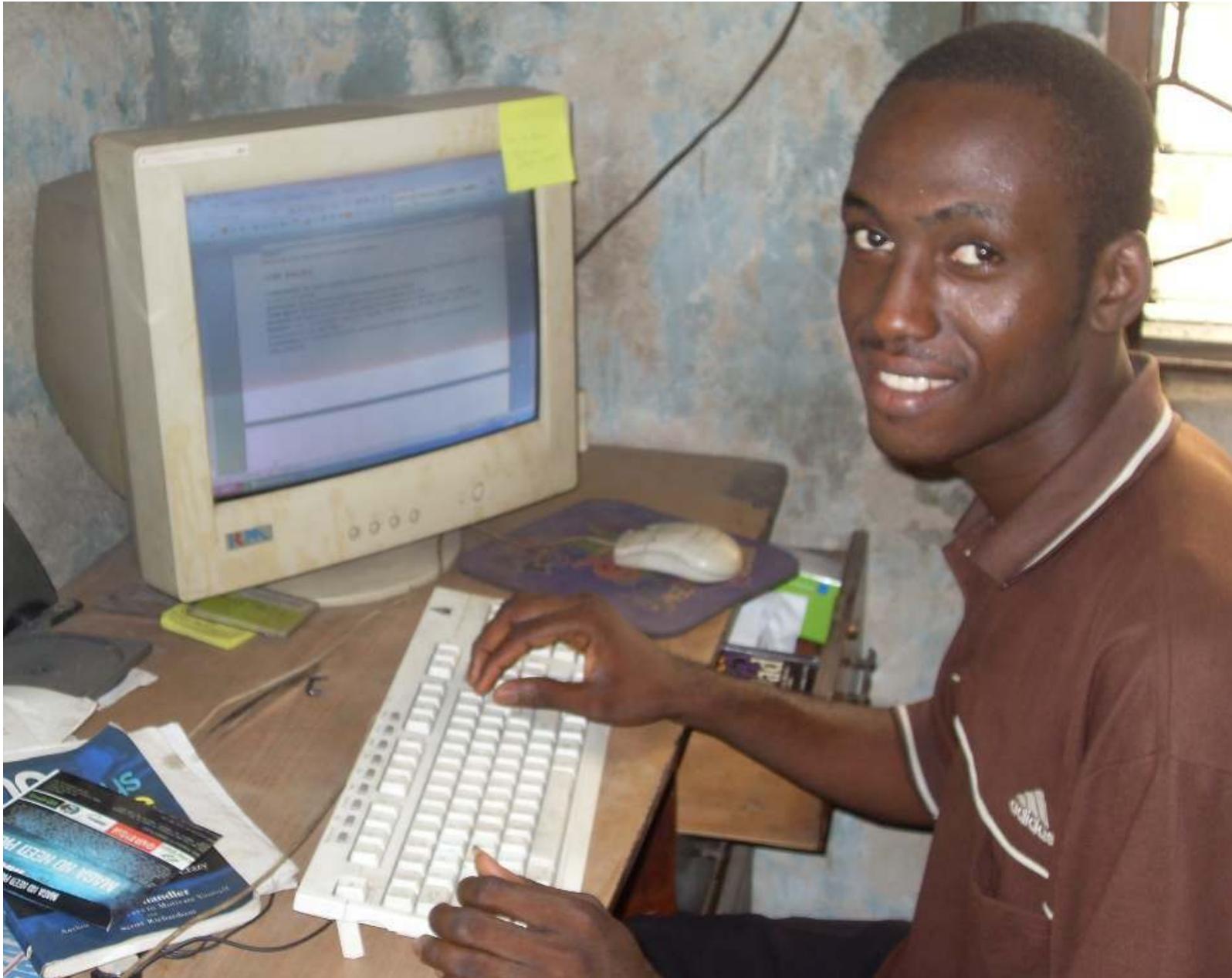




Olatoyosi Deborah

Olatoyosi Deborah, 22, is a member of Ajegunle.org's class of 2009. She joined the program "to acquire relevant skills and attitude that will meet present demands." Before Ajegunle.org, she kept her mind engaged through personal development programs such as reading motivational and career building books by "proven authors". "I was also attending seminars and workshops," she added. "Ajegunle.org, as a vehicle, has given me the platform to maximize my potentials and has exposed me to people and places. Now, I work with First City Monument Bank and it has been a great privilege identifying with Ajegunle.org." Deborah was shortlisted for PIN's internship partnership with FCMB but she was reassigned to the main employment pool where she proved herself through the various interview stages. She has trained 5 people so far, mostly family and friends. In 5 years, she opined, "I see myself as one of the female ICT ambassadors, visiting different places and impacting lives positively." Toyosi is one of the two graduates who have been selected to tell their stories at an ICT conference in Zambia in May 2010, with sponsorship from the Commonwealth Foundation.





Paul Ighorodje

Paul Ighorodje joined the training program in 2008, at the age of 21. His motivation was, according to him, "the exploits of graduates." He was already working on a business idea before the training, hence his excitement that he was able to learn how to "write a good business plan and communicate an idea effectively." Highlights for him after the training include discussing his business idea with a bank and a stint at the British Deputy High Commission's Trade & Investment. "My family and friends were impressed because I once missed an opportunity to study in a computer school. I have trained 3 people – two friends and a neighbour. In 5 years, I will be an established entrepreneur." On March 13, 2010, Paul's colleagues (fellow alumni) elected him – through a democratic process – as the alumni president of a group of about 100 graduates of the program who meet periodically to discuss issues ranging from supporting the selection of new trainees to motivating one another by sharing success stories.





Richards Opurum

Richards Opurum joined the program at the age of 24, in 2007. "The desire to become computer literate, have knowledge about the internet and also do business online" was his motivation for signing up. Before Ajegunle.org, he was marketing germicides and also "training hard towards my football career - which is my priority." For him, his "ability to work with the computer and the internet, and the exposure during my six (6) months internship with DHL" represent the major gains from the training. His 4 trainees include Chinedu Opurum (brother), Segun Olaniyi (friend), Uchechukwu Abaike (friend) and Bright Okere (neighbour). While at DHL, Richards was a member of the organization's football team, and he now believes that in 5 years, "I will be playing professional football in one of the best clubs in Europe, I would have established myself in the football world, I would have become a household name through football, I would have changed the cause of history in my family and I would have affected lives through football."





Samson Banjo

Samson Banjo, 25, joined Ajegunle.org in 2007 having been motivated to join by Uncommon Man Network, a group of young Ajegunle residents who gather for weekly mentorship under the supervision of Praise Fowowe – who lived in the community himself. When asked about what he was doing before joining the program, Samson said he was already giving serious consideration to the possibility of earning desperate income through online fraud – an act that is popular among many young Nigerians who believe that the government’s inability to provide livelihood opportunities is an excuse for them to choose the illegal path. “The program improved my knowledge in ICT and also introduced me to entrepreneurship and the visible reaction from my friends and family has been positive. I have trained 6 people, most of whom are close friends and neighbors – and I met some in the cybercafé.” He added, “I see myself as an entertainer and entrepreneur. My group, the National Association of Crazy Artistes (NACA), is one of the most outstanding drama-comedy groups in the world but we lack a platform to showcase our potentials as entertainers. I hope that will change in the next 5 years.”





Samuel Umoh

Samuel Umoh was 19 when he joined the Ajegunle.org training program. "Apart from the fact that we were going to be trained on ICT and entrepreneurship, my major motivating factor to join the project was the impact profile of the organizers because I didn't want to be exploited." Before Ajegunle.org, Samuel was teaching adults how to read and write, and also worked as a teacher in an evening supplementary class. He's quick to speak of the impact of the program: "One of my achievements remains the fact that I had opportunity to meet and connect with some very important persons, I was given a scholarship to attend another training program, I learnt to think on how to implement a business plan and I was introduced to a new application, Photoshop. I have now trained more than 15 people, including: a doctor who needed the training towards a program he signed up for in South Africa, a lady running a Masters program in Public Health at the University of Lagos, a graduate of Chemical Engineering who got a job but needed a month of computing training before resumption, and some family members." In 5 years, he wants to be a psychologist ready to take on a career in Communication and Human Relationships.





Senge Cynthia

At 22, Cynthia Senge applied to join the Ajegunle.org program in 2009. She speaks of why she made the decision to sign up: "I was thirsty for knowledge, [and] just wanted to do anything that would add to me. Also, I really didn't know anything about some of the basic things I needed to know in computing even though I studied Computer Science in the Polytechnic. Plus, I was doing nothing at home." She added, "Getting computing knowledge is my first major achievement through Ajegunle.org. Giving me the opportunity of completing an internship program in a corporate organization taught me some ethics of the workplace. Before Ajegunle.org, I had never been to Victoria Island or the British Deputy High Commission but I had the opportunity of going there after the program and meeting eminent persons like Peter Stephenson." Cynthia is not one to spare words in describing her experience: "My family is surprised that such an NGO exists, that could train people for free without collecting a dime." She has 4 trainees to her credit, including her mum and three friends from her neighborhood. She added, "5 years from now I would have graduated from a university, and because I love music so much, I intend coming up with a hit album in less than 5 years."





Our Partners

These stories of transformed lives are made possible through the kind support of our board, staff, partners, volunteers (including alumni) and others. We thank you for your kind support, and look forward to working with you towards weaving more stories from Ajegunle and other communities! As the chapters unfold, we will highlight our other stakeholders, but in this combined edition, we wish to thank the following partners who have supported through grants or internship placements.

Grants

Microsoft Nigeria
Commonwealth Foundation

Internship Placements

Afrinvest West Africa
British High Commission
DHL Nigeria
First City Monument Bank
HoneySuckles
London Metropolitan University
Lornamead Africa
Nigerian Bottling Company PLC
Standard Chartered Bank
UK Trade & Investment

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