

GIRLS' EDUCATION & COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION PROJECT (GECP)

FINAL EVALUATION

February 25-March 18, 2013

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GCEP FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

Acknowledgements

Our team wishes to thank the many people who made this report possible. We are particularly indebted to the World Education staff that made themselves available. The World Education, Inc. (WEI), director in Benin, Alan Miller, was always willing to share his considerable experience with us. WEI has built an enviable reputation in Northern Benin and part of the availability of the respondents is because of the effectiveness of their work over many years. Three WEI staff, Ms. Mélanie Sodoloufo, Mr. Josué Ogouchina, and Ms. Ganiyatou Adeniyi, accompanied us during the field work to facilitate contacts with the local NGOs and local officials. They also spent considerable time on the telephone to modify the calendar to suit the schedule of busy local officials. When asked, they provided valuable background information concerning difficulties the project had encountered.

Such an evaluation demands not only logistical planning, but also that participants be available despite their demanding duties. We were able to meet with the members of the local APE and AME (the number of participants, particularly of the AME was impressive), representatives of the CAPE, school directors, heads of districts (CCS), mayors or their representative, members of local NGOs, and partners who have collaborated with WEI in several areas. We appreciated tremendously the candor of all these officials.

We want to extend our special thanks to the parents who sang and danced to welcome us, and who impressed us with their commitment to their children's future. Most of them will not read this report because they have not had the opportunity to attend school and thus cannot read. Yet they wish for their children to do so and we hope that they will see their hard work rewarded and their wish fulfilled.

The sharing of ideas and points of view would not have been possible without the contribution of the translators; sometimes a teacher, sometimes a member of the local NGO, sometimes a member of the community. Their assistance was essential.

We want to acknowledge the contribution of the people who joined us in the feedback session that took place on March 18, 2013.

Sincerely, the evaluation team

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SUMMARY

This report presents the results of the Girls Education and Community Participation (GECPC) project's final evaluation.

The Intervention

The intervention zone is characterized by particularly low-levels of school attendance, especially among girls. Using the gross enrollment rate of girls to rank all communes in Benin, the communes in the northern intervention zone (Atacora, Borgou/Alibori) averaged 69 out of 77 communes, with 77 the lowest GER. However, participating communes in the south had an average rank of 17.

Starting in 2008, the interventions eventually involved 16 communes and 662 villages within these communes for a duration lasting between 20 and 53 weeks, depending on the needs of the schools in the area. The following intermediate results were sought:

- Increased access to and improved performance of girls in schools in targeted areas.
- Improved community contribution to transparent management of the education system.
- Improved response to HIV/AIDS in the basic education sector.

In order to achieve these results, the project sought to improve individual schools' parent teachers' association's (APE) organizational capacity to create a mothers' association (AME) that works in close collaboration with the APE, and to develop the AME's organizational capacity. Working collaboratively, the two organizations learned how to prepare action plans, coordinate their activities, bring about the changes they had decided upon, and adhere to rules of good governance and transparent management.

Working within their own organization made it possible for mothers to be involved in activities that benefit the school and the children, and enabled women to acquire new skills. Participation in the AME facilitated the exchange of ideas among women members. With these newly acquired skills and confidence it was expected that eventually, women would begin to be elected to the APE boards.

World Education, Inc. (WEI), an international organization, used an open bidding process to recruit local NGOs according to strict standards. WEI trained and assisted NGOs as needed and monitored the execution of the action plans. In turn, the NGOs trained and assisted the local APEs and AMEs. Early in the intervention, the community selected issues confronting its school and selected projects that were designed to improve the situation.

Communities engaged in a wide range of activities such as repairing or purchasing classroom furniture, building housing for teachers, creating study spaces, and launching small enterprises in order to raise funds. In addition to these community-wide endeavors, AME members were involved in day-to-day school affairs such as monitoring attendance, discussing problems with teachers or the principal, and ensuring that the school was kept clean.

GECP paid special attention to the improvement of girls' participation and success in school, as traditionally girls have not been encouraged to attend school or were not allowed to attend long enough to complete the sixth grade.

GECP sought to improve community participation in the running of the school by teaching the principles of transparent and effective governance. Organizational capacity was quantitatively assessed twice a year using well-tested instruments that identified areas in need of improvement. Training involved topics such as running board elections, the content of the board's roles, keeping records, developing a budget, etc. In addition, the AMEs and APEs were trained on HIV-transmission and prevention.

The individual schools' PTAs are federated at the commune level in an organization (CAPE in French) whose members are elected from among individual PTA's board members. These communal PTAs were also trained in governance, lobbying, record keeping, and other essential organizational tasks.

Evaluation Method

The evaluation team visited 9 of the 16 communes involved in the project, and 14 villages within those communes. In order to capture the diversity of AME activities carried out under GECP, evaluation villages were selected based on the types of projects carried out by their AME (e.g. building classrooms or teacher housing). While some activities, such as student censuses, were common to all communities, major activities¹ varied from community to community. Given the importance of the project, the selected sites provided an opportunity to experience the full range of community circumstances and activities.

The preparatory phase of the evaluation included a thorough reading of quarterly and yearly reports, and familiarization with the monitoring data collected by WEI. In addition, data for the years 2005-06 to 2011-12, provided by the Ministry's statistical bureau, were compiled in order to make comparisons between the intervention zone and the rest of the country.

The analysis of the quantitative evidence focuses on the evolution of the relevant indicators between the beginning of the intervention and the time when activities stopped. Indicators include the overall enrollment growth by gender and the evolution of sixth grade enrollments². The ministry also relies on the gross enrollment rate. That statistic, however, is of unknown reliability because the denominator is the estimation of the commune's school age population. That estimation uses the 2002 census as a starting point, from which yearly projections were extrapolated.

The qualitative evidence is based on the interviews with members of 14 AMEs and APEs, five CAPE, 12 school directors, four district supervisors (CCS), seven mayors or their representatives,

¹ Major activities were those for which the community had to raise at least 20% of the cost, although on average, communities raised 30%. Communities enjoyed significant autonomy in selecting project to address a particularly salient issue (teachers' absence, for example), and WEI contributed up to \$1,000 USD per project.

² Sixth grade is the last primary grade. This grade conditions entry into secondary school, and historically girls have not been well represented.

UNICEF Cotonou office, and WEI's field office in Parakou because WEI and UNICEF have collaborated extensively over the years. All four NGOs with whom WEI had signed a contract and who were still active in the field in March 2013 were also interviewed. The leaders of an additional NGO with special expertise in the area of AIDS education that partnered with WEI were also interviewed.

The presentation of the evaluation's findings follows a chronological approach: the interventions in the communities were designed to make school boards and parents more effective. This was accomplished by helping APEs and AMEs solve school problems and by increasing parents' involvement in school affairs. The project monitored effectiveness quantitatively every six months. The planned activities resulted in tangible physical realizations, such as classrooms, and also in more interaction and communication both between individual women and between AMEs and APEs. Success has been clearly evident: more children in school, more girls reaching the sixth grade, teachers less frequently absent because they had been provided a place to live. Changes in the quantitative indicators reflect the outcomes of the parents' activities.

One note of caution is in order: this intervention was not designed as an experiment with control groups. National statistics are provided only to contextualize the findings pertaining to the intervention zone. The school conditions prior to the start of the intervention are not known, nor are the events that may have affected the outcomes. In particular, the presence or absence of trained teachers, the availability of books and supplies, the accessibility of the school by all children, and the existence of school lunch programs, are unknown. Yet these school conditions affect the willingness of parents to send their children to school. Lastly, it is likely that these factors interact with each other in ways that are not yet understood. Why some schools achieve spectacular results while others, starting at a similar participation level, do not, would require comparative case studies beyond the scope of this evaluation.

I. COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

Of the numerous interviews conducted, the most memorable are those with members of the AMEs. First, the number of members who came to meet the evaluation team was impressive, often exceeding 60 women (who often sang and danced to welcome the team). Second, the enthusiasm of AME members, their detailed answers, and their pride in showing what they had accomplished led to the strong conviction that these were groups that had and would continue to have a positive impact on their community. Even after the conclusion of the project, many activities not requiring funding continue. These impressions were corroborated in interviews with the other groups.

The AMEs focus is on children and the forces that affect their schooling. The list of activities illustrates the wide range of issues that AMEs tackle, sometimes alone, sometimes in collaboration with the APE:

Activities to improve schooling conditions

- Conduct censuses of school-age children during the summer before the school year begins.
- Combat child trafficking and the sending of children to traditional socialization ceremonies during the school year.
- Purchase first aid kits for schools and create a fund to renew school supplies.
- Build classrooms or housing for teachers.
- Raise funds (e.g., creating a mill and charging a usage fee to pay for school supplies) and purchase of supplies for indigent children.

Activities designed to improve academic success

- Discussions with the APE and the director concerning attendance issues and the academic work of children.
- Create and finance study spaces (e.g. paraffin for the lamp).
- Create awards for academic achievements for boys and girls.
- Lobby authorities to assign teachers to the community.

Fight against HIV/AIDS

- Organize groups to listen to and discuss radio programs dealing with HIV/AIDS.
- Participation in workshops organized to increase the awareness of the disease.
- Mother-and-daughter discussions after risky sexual behavior training.

Outreach

- Participation in radio programs to inform members of other communities and reinforce commitment to educational participation and success.
- Meet with women in other communities and talk about AMEs
- Intervene with other members of the community so girls will not be forced to marry before having finished school; find girls who have been kidnapped and bring them back to the community.

Changing gender roles

Attaining the objectives, even partially, unleashes additional changes that have magnified AME impact. Seeing more girls enrolled in the sixth grade makes it possible to expect that all girls should reach that grade. More harmonious relationships between parents and teachers can

constitute a form of encouragement for that teacher, particularly if he³ sees that the children are now being supervised by the parents or a surrogate selected by them.

Most importantly, women's roles now include participation in community activities. Women can meet independently, discuss, reach an agreement, and make their point of view known to the APE, in particular. Their voices are no longer easily dismissed individual voices; instead the concerns and opinions of mothers come from a unified group.

Their strength stems from the fact that mothers have traditionally been responsible for their children's education. With the advent of universal, free formal schooling, women are learning new roles that are considered culturally legitimate because they fall within the traditional role allocation. As a group, mothers have demonstrated that they can organize themselves and contribute to the community's schools and, more generally, to their children's welfare.

One member summarized the views of many when she declared, "Before GECP, AMEs did not exist. Women did not even come to the school. Today, they participate in the life of the school. They take part in the fight against HIV/AIDS. The activities will continue after the end of the project following the training GECP provided."

The newly acquired respect and status translates into being elected to the APE board. The number of women on APE boards did not exceed three in the visited communities and none were key members, such as president or vice-president. Yet some CAPEs have women members and all interviewees observed that women's participation in the CAPE was desirable and that it would inevitably increase over time.

We asked both APE board members and AMEs whether conflict has occurred between the two organizations. The answer was an emphatic "no" from both the AME and APE members. These statements were corroborated by the school directors.

The organizational assessments (ERO and EAF) showed that effectiveness improved over the life of the project and that it had reached a satisfactory level in most areas. When asked to explain the specifics of ERO, for example, interviewees cited specific questions and mentioned areas in need of improvement.

Members of the APE boards confirmed what AME members had reported. For example, members of the Molla APE said, "They come to the general assembly. If we want to buy something, we tell them and we show them what has been bought. They participate in the decisions before they are taken. They report what is missing and the APE decides what should be done."

One CAPE summarized all the AME's contributions: "At the beginning, there were only 6 AMEs (in the commune), but now every school has one that collaborates with the APE. The AMEs have been involved in classroom construction, housing for teachers, maintaining children in school, cleaning the school at the beginning of the school year, carrying out a census of all children, and fighting against unwanted pregnancies. They also mediate when an unwanted pregnancy occurs

³ In rural areas, women teachers are very rare.

and get the police involved if the mediation fails. The AME supervises the study groups, they participate in exchange visits, and they take care of indigent children.”

A deputy mayor concurred. To the question concerning what he thought of the AME’s activities, he replied, “Once the training had been done, they became involved in the school. They managed to make their daughters more aware of the need to go to school. In my village, kidnappings have decreased and have become rare. In 2008, it was a disaster.”

The list of activities carried out by individual AMEs and APEs is impressive and it is particularly noteworthy that large sums of money were raised by the communities. Although only 20% of the cost of a project need to be provided by the community, on average more than 30% was raised. Given the prevalent poverty, these numbers demonstrate the high level of commitment to the objectives of the project.

World Education, Inc.’s role

Before turning to the quantitative outcomes, mention should be made of the role played by World Education, Inc., which has had headquarters in Parakou for about 20 years. WEI has built a strong and commendable reputation regionally and nationally. Many interviewees, formally and informally, found an occasion to praise WEI’s commitment, competence, and availability. WEI leads when the chief of party and staff conclude that certain actions would contribute to the objectives’ attainment. Two examples illustrate this point:

WEI carried out a program that was not originally planned but that constituted an effective response to the problems facing rural schools: shortage of teachers and bi-yearly recruitment of new students. With the support of USAID, WEI asked the Ministry’s unit responsible for training to develop teacher training programs in multi-grade teaching. This is a widely used practice in rural areas throughout the world but it had not been used in Benin. It is a complex activity that demands specific training. Ultimately, 406 primary school teachers were trained and the teaching manual is now available in the teacher training institutions. This development shows what an experienced and committed organization can accomplish.

The “activism” of WEI can be further illustrated by citing the issue of school budgets. It had been the Government of Benin’s policy that the school budget (provided by the central government) falls under the joint responsibility of the PTA and the school director. However, the Ministry decided that an accountant would be responsible for carrying out the purchases and dispatching the items to the school. This led to the impression that accountants were responsible for the school’s budgetary decisions. WEI asked for a clarification since, if the new practice constituted a new policy, it jeopardized the years of work trying to increase parents’ participation in school affairs. The Minister sent a letter explaining that the accountants were responsible for the financial administration of the funds, but not for the decisions. WEI made copies of the Minister’s letter and distributed it so that PTAs could continue to be involved in decisions. These events demonstrate that the WEI staff is strongly committed to the principles of community governance and that they know how to intervene in a manner that produces the desired results.

Good Governance and Educational Success

GECP monitored the performance of AMEs, APEs, and CAPE approximately every six months. The project relied on Rapid Organizational Assessment (ERO in French), an instrument used in other projects that is designed to assess the extent to which organizations adhere to good governance practices, for example whether they hold elections regularly or whether members understand the organization's mission. In June 2012, eight communes were still involved in the project and their organizational performance was measured. The data reveal differences between AMEs, but despite these differences, the mean performance levels reached a satisfactory level.

However, the APEs' budgets were not as frequently available as considered desirable. This is also the case for the monitoring of funds given the director to purchase supplies or expenditures approved by the board. The availability of the budget and the procedure for purchase underwent an important administrative change, as explained above, that led to confusion. This circumstance suggests that ERO is a valid instrument that captures change.

QUANTITATIVE OUTCOMES

Several outcomes were sought: increase girls' access and performance in school. One of the most telling indicators of girls' access to schooling has been improvements in enrollment rates for girls. The tables below show the estimated changes in enrollment growth, with changes in the north of Benin shown against changes in the south, where the population has generally had greater access to education.

First and Sixth Enrollment growth 2007-2011

	GECP North ⁴		Benin	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
First grade	25,86%	27,11%	-3,51%	-1,96%
Sixth Grade	-1,61%	16,27%	-10,67%	-2,43%

Gross enrollment ratios change 2007-2011

	GECP North	Benin
GER boys	24%	17%
GER girls	34%	27%
Total GER	25%	22%

The north is one of the most disadvantaged areas in Benin. The two communes with the worst gross enrollment ratios included in the project were in the north and ranked 76th and 77th out of 77 communes in the country. They retained that rank at the conclusion of the project, despite having been involved longer—50 months—than all other communes, which averaged 30 months in the project. First-grade enrollment increases averaged 26% for boys and 27% for girls in these northern communes, while sixth-grade enrollments decreased by 2% for boys and

⁴ North = Districts of Atacora, Borgou, Alibori

increased by 16% for girls. These numbers are in sharp contrast to the negative growth that occurred in the rest of the country, for boys more than for girls.

In order to ascertain whether girls stay in school as long as boys, the number of students in the first grade was compared to enrollments in the 6th grade five years later. That analysis shows that 60% of girls in GECP areas (and 66% of boys) on average reach the sixth grade five years after starting school (equal to the national average).

However, large differences between communes exist. A substantial proportion of girls—the majority in some areas—do not reach the sixth grade in a timely fashion. In the commune of Karimama, for example, only 36% of girls reach the sixth grade, compared to a national figure of 60%. The overall trend, nationally and in the communes, is for the proportion of girls to diminish in the fifth and fall even more in the sixth grade.

Grade repetition for girls is very similar to that of boys. In 2006-07 and 2007-08, the grade repetition increased and remained at the 12% level for girls and 11% for boys.

On average, 15% of girls and 13% of boys drop out at any time. The percentage of children who drop out has increased in recent years: 20% for girls and 16% for boys on average. This suggests that, with increased enrollments, some students (girls more than boys), experience difficulties in school and eventually drop out. Karimama experienced the highest drop-out rate with 29%, and Segbana, with 7% for girls and 2% for boys, the lowest.

CONTEXTUALIZING THE FINDINGS

Given the environment and the short duration of the intervention in most communes, the project achieved good quantitative results. Parental involvement and improved governance constitute very positive outcomes. The ability of AMEs and APEs to be active and to cooperate with each other predict a high probability of sustainability. The AME movement is here to stay and this constitutes a major accomplishment. Nonetheless, communities still face very difficult conditions. Among these, teacher shortage is of tremendous concern because it affects attendance, retention, and success. These are problems that the community cannot resolve alone.

These communities are experiencing a major social and cultural change that involves the slow transformation of children from domestic and agricultural workers into beneficiaries of an investment (schooling and opportunity costs). This change may affect girls even more because they usually have significant household responsibilities and are expected to marry shortly after puberty. These major cultural and societal changes must be taken into consideration when interpreting the quantitative evidence.

LESSONS LEARNED

Involving local NGOs in project implementation is an effective way of local building capacity and ensuring that the project's benefits extend beyond the lifetime of the project.

The AMEs could be used in many areas in addition to education, although their involvement role in that sector will continue to be essential. Other areas of involvement for AMEs could be:

- Extending the AMEs to lower secondary schools. The transition to the secondary is problematic in all countries and girls need special protection when they enter the 7th and higher grades. Educated mothers could play an important role in facilitating the transition to the secondary and in helping adolescent girls succeed.
- Involvement in health issues, such as malaria prevention and improved nutrition, hygiene, and public health.
- Using AMEs and APEs as living examples of the importance of good governance in development. AMEs and APEs could become case studies in civic education.
- Using AMEs to organize school feeding programs could provide income possibilities, both as producers of food and as organizers.
- APEs or similar organizations could assist in environmental protection such as deforestation prevention because they use wood to cook.

Fostering parental involvement in educational governance has limits. Women are still mostly illiterate and thus remain dependent upon literate members of the community and men. That is how the broadening of the AME approach to secondary education might help, since secondary AMEs would probably include educated women. Of course, it is unknown whether educated women would have the same enthusiasm and would work as diligently as members of the primary AMEs.

List of Acronyms

APE	Association de parents d'élèves
AME	Association de mères d'élèves
AVD	Association villageoise de développement
CAPE	Coordination des Associations de Parents d'élèves
CEP	Certificat d'études primaires
CP	Conseiller pédagogique
CS	Circonscription scolaire
C/CS	Chef de circonscription scolaire
CP	Conseiller pédagogique
INFRE	Institut national pour la formation et la recherche en éducation
MEMP	Ministère des Enseignements Maternel et Primaire
NGO	Non-governmental organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WEI	World Education, Inc.

I. CHALLENGES FACING THE PRIMARY EDUCATION SYSTEM IN BENIN.

The Girls Education and Community Participation project (GECPC) is one of many interventions carried out to problems within Benin's primary educational system. GECPC was financed by USAID, a longtime partner of the Government of Benin (GOB), which has played a key role in significantly increasing enrollments and decreasing gender disparities. Despite the support of USAID and many other partners (DANIDA, UNICEF, AFD, the World Bank, etc.), primary schools in Benin still face significant challenges.

1.1. The Challenges

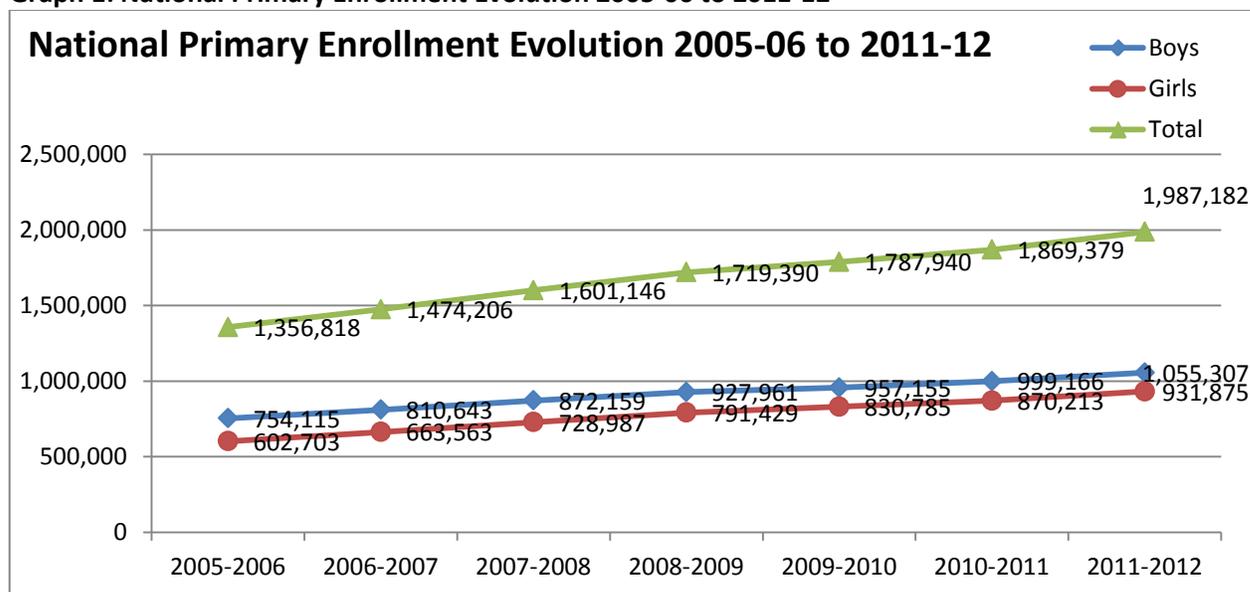
Rapidly increasing enrollment has created major issues, in particular a teacher shortage and facilities that are insufficient in quantity and quality. Both of these issues create a self-reinforcing poor learning environment. Grade repetition is high (thus increasing enrollment) and that leads students, girls especially, to drop out before completing the full primary cycle. Hence, the benefits of education accrue only to a relatively small proportion of the population, boys more than girls and urban residents more than rural ones. Beyond the community, the educational system is highly centralized, characterized by frequent teacher strikes and by rigid bureaucratic practices that make change difficult to implement.

The challenges go beyond the GOB's ability to fulfill the promise the country's Constitution makes to all its young citizens: to be able to attend school and to learn. External assistance from experienced partners represents an important tool to bring about the needed changes.

1.2. Rapid growth in the recent past and in the foreseeable future

One of the most salient challenges can be termed "the cost of success": enrollments have increased rapidly, reaching two million children in 2012-13 in all grades, or about 700,000 more children enrolled than in 2005. This significant increase in enrollment has created a demand for about 12,000 additional teachers, classrooms and other essentials (teacher recruitment and training, books, school feeding programs). Subsequently, the increasing number of primary school graduates creates a large demand for secondary education. The financial consequences of this high educational demand, absent a high rate of economic growth, stresses public finances and presents significant organizational challenges.

Graph 1: National Primary Enrollment Evolution 2005-06 to 2011-12⁵



1.3. Teacher shortage and low levels of learning

In the course of our conversations, parents, school directors, and district supervisors (CCS) reported a significant teacher shortage in the North. All available evidence shows that the implicit promise made to children who enroll (learning will take place) is not being kept. The most recent evaluation of student learning carried out on a random sample of all schools in the country in May 2011 showed that the minimal level of competency is reached by about 25% of second and fifth grade students.⁶ This evidence corroborates that of previous evaluations which, regardless of the methodology and the grades involved, revealed a similar dearth of learning. The low level of learning is unequally distributed between rural and urban children (girls in particular) and between private and public schools (80% of enrollment).

II. THE GECP PROJECT

The GECP project's design was based on the success of several previous projects carried out by WEI:

2.1. Previous Projects

2.1.1. Primary Education NGO Project

⁵ Source: MEMP annuaires statistiques : 2005-06 ; 2006-07 ; 2007-08 ; 2008-09 ; 2009-10 ; 2010-11 ; 2011-12 (preliminary version).

⁶ MEMP. Avril 2012. Comité Technique du Ministère avec l'assistance de Maurice Garnier: Rapport de présentation des résultats de l'évaluation sur les acquis des élèves du CP et du CM1 dans les écoles primaires publiques et privées du Bénin.

The Primary Education NGO Project's (PENGOP) goal was to increase civil society's involvement in the co-management of schools. This system of co-management is an official GOB policy on school administration. These goals derive from the realization that citizens must participate in the governance of their institutions, on the one hand, and on the other that parents must be involved in their children's school if it is to operate effectively. ATAPE sought to improve the organizational capacity of the Parent-Teacher Associations (APE) by, among many other activities, encouraging school construction. This provided a motivating and effective practice in self-governance. The training and supervision were carried out by local NGOs whose experience generally remained in the intervention area. The final evaluation indicated that the project had met its objectives.

2.1.2. Civic Action in the School Environment

Civic Action in the School Environment's (CASE) major objective was to improve the participation of women in the decisions that affect their children's school. CASE facilitated the creation of the School Mothers' Associations (AMEs), an organization regrouping mothers who work in partnership with the official APE. All these actors seek to influence decisions, particularly those affecting girls' schooling. Under CASE, girls not yet enrolled were actively recruited and they benefitted from several types of support designed to insure that girls would remain in school and succeed.

In order to carry out the strategy, CASE relied on training designed to strengthen the organizational capacity of the APE and AME. The training was carried out by local NGOs previously trained by WEI. Community radio programs spread the message that girls should attend school and popularized the concept of the AME by having active AME members answer callers' questions in the local language. The final evaluation of CASE was highly positive.

2.1.3. Japan II & III projects parent participation in school maintenance:

This project, managed by WEI, relied on the APE to organize the maintenance of the school's buildings. The project supported the creation of school maintenance manuals in local languages and members of the APE were trained by WEI to create and carry out maintenance plans.

2.1.4. World Food Programme project

The World Food Program (WFP), in collaboration with WEI, trained members of the APE so that they could actively participate, and supervise, school feeding programs.

2.1.5. Education First project

Funded by the US Department of Labor and primed Catholic Relief Service (CRS), with WEI and Terre des Hommes as subpartners, the Education First project was designed to reduce child trafficking, a prevalent practice in certain parts of Benin. Women were mobilized at the community level to keep track of victims of trafficking and to bring them back to their community so they could attend school.

2.2. Previous interventions' lessons

These projects demonstrated that a community based approach yields strong results, particularly when women are encouraged to contribute. Success, however, is contingent upon two conditions: First, that activities should be culturally appropriate, such as mothers' being involved in children's education, with the division of labor contributing to the attainment of a community goal without infringing on the traditional division of labor. Second, activities should build upon and increase communities' understanding and capacity for practicing effective institutional management.

III. GECP BASIC CHARACTERISTICS

GECP did not directly provide formal education services;⁷ rather it followed intervention principles applied in earlier projects by acting on key components of the school's environment: governance as well as community and parental involvement. These activities were intended to produce an environment more supportive of learning. One of the project's major goals was to improve access to school for girls so that the promise of universal education would be kept. In addition, improved governance would provide an opportunity for citizens to learn how to manage their own affairs in an area of great importance to them.

The selected communities were characterized by levels of enrollments for girls far below the national average. Using the gross enrollment rate of girls to rank all communes in Benin, the communes in the northern intervention zone (Atacora, Borgou/Alibori) averaged 69 out of 77 communes, with 77 the lowest GER. However, participating communes in the south had an average rank of 17.

3.1. At the Commune level:

The activities took place, in part, at the commune level where the municipal government and the supervisor of all schools in the commune are located. Municipalities have recently been

⁷ The educational system is centralized and all issues of pedagogy and learning fall under the purview of the Ministry of Education through the hierarchical levels. However, official statutes stipulate that parents should elect a school board that will jointly manage the school's budget and make decisions with the school director.

made responsible for school construction and maintenance and they have elaborated development plans in which education plays a significant role. A municipal official is responsible for the supervision of the development programs involving education. Municipalities are not responsible for the supervision of pedagogical activities which fall under the authority of the school director and the district supervisor.

The CAPE is located in the district headquarters. This elected body links the local school APE with the commune.⁸ Members of the CAPE are elected from among all local APE board members. In short, the commune is where the municipality, the representative of the central school administration and the parents' association converge.

3.2. At the Community level:

School directors represent the central administration, which appoints directors to schools. Directors manage the school's resources allocated by the central government, and are also required to make key decisions (including purchases of supplies) in partnership with the school's elected APE board.

That is why it is essential for APE board members to know how to discharge their duties. These skills will make it possible for the board to become an effective organization adhering to standards of sound management. Improving the effectiveness of APEs was one of the project's goals.

APE boards have historically been composed of mainly men. When involved with the APE, women have historically been granted very little official responsibility. Yet, women are traditionally responsible for their children's education. In order for them to participate in their children's schooling, women need to acquire a voice and to develop the competencies that would allow them to become involved in school affairs.

AMEs were designed to facilitate women's participation in decisions. Women's activities would increase girls' participation in education directly and indirectly (directly because mothers would improve learning conditions, indirectly because girls would see the importance their mothers gave education). As girls would see their mother involved in important decisions, they would learn that it is possible for women to simultaneously be a mother and an influential community member.

A fundamental principle governed the creation of AMEs: on no account were they to be perceived as replacing the APE. Rather, they were to become partners of the APE and activities would be coordinated between the two. It was hoped that, with increased activity and success, some women would eventually be elected to the APE board.

⁸ The American reader will find it easy to understand how the system works: In a county, each school could have a PTA and these individual schools' PTA could elect another board charged with county wide issues. The CAPE is a county-wide PTA, but the members of the county PTA would have to be elected to their individual school PTA first and then be elected by the individual school PTA to represent the school at the county level. In Benin, the commune is divided into districts and an attempt is made to have one member from each district on the CAPE board.

AMEs could be formally structured and elect a board if they wished, or they could operate more informally. This flexibility in the AMEs organization reflects the project's method of operation: activities are selected on the basis of the community's collective decisions so that they will develop answers to the community's problems. That is why interventions were always preceded by a series of discussions between men, between women and, later, between men and women. An action plan was developed once a consensus had been reached concerning the key educational issues in the community and how these would be resolved.

3. 3. Duration of the intervention

Each school involved in the GECP project received support from a local NGO for approximately two years, which trained APE and AMEs in order to improve girls' participation in school, to assist with their micro projects and to learn how to operate cooperatively. Several communes, however, benefitted from longer interventions because their key indicators were particularly low. In reality, the length of the interventions varied between 20 months for the most recently added communes of Segbana, Kandi, Pèrèrè and Nikki (the project increased the number of schools involved) to about 50 months in Malanville, Karimama, Nikki, Kandi and Pèrèrè.

In addition, WEI established partnerships with other national or international organizations that were active in WEI's intervention zones. This was the case in the very difficult communes of Kandi, Karimama, and Malanville where WEI cooperated with UNICEF. WEI was involved in GECP activities and UNICEF made supplies available to the schools, which was not a part of the GECP mandate. However, particularly in impoverished communities, the availability of school supplies assisted the goal of keeping children in school because supplies contribute to learning. Another partnership was also developed with OSV Jordan, a NGO specializing in HIV/AIDS education and intervention. Yet another type of collaboration involved INFRE, the training arm of the ministry, which developed a training program so that teachers in rural area could successfully teach several grades in one classroom.⁹

Interventions differed from one commune to another, depending on the presence of other organizations and on the choices made by the community. While GECP adheres to fundamental principles (community participation, transparency, among others), the specific activities were not identical in all communities because that would have violated the principle of community decisions.

The multiplicity of interventions made it difficult to conceptualize the evaluation. It is difficult, for example, to ascertain whether building teachers' housing is more effective in improving girls' enrollment or academic achievement, than is the generation of revenues that assist poor children to stay in school.¹⁰

⁹ This method is widely used throughout the world in sparsely populated areas. However, it was not used in Benin despite the technique's well established effectiveness.

¹⁰ Statistical techniques designed to analyze qualitative data exist. Preparing the data to use them goes well beyond the resources available for a project evaluation. See: Ragin, Charles C. *Redesigning Social Inquiry: Fuzzy Sets and Beyond*. University of Chicago Press 2008.

3.4. Intervention modalities

Agreements were signed between WEI and local NGOs who were then trained by WEI to assist communities. The following steps were followed:

1. Field workers and coordinators were recruited and trained. Training involved the content of GECF and the tools needed to implement the activities that would reflect the choices made by the community. Meetings were held with men and women separately so that women would develop their own point of view and then be able to present it to the rest of the community, not as individual persons, but as spokeswomen for the group. This practice was essential because it is legitimate for a woman to communicate her peer's point of view particularly if it concerns children's issues.
2. An action plan was drafted.
3. An agreement between WEI and the AME was signed,
4. Financing modalities and of the micro-project selected by the AME was agreed upon.
5. Evaluation of the process and closing of the partnership between WEI and the AME.

IV. FINAL EVALUATION

GECF activities ended in April 2013. The interventions took place in 16 communities spread over a vast area of the country (Atacora, Borgou, Alibori in the North and Mono/Couffo and Zou in the South). The interventions were staggered over time, involving 424 APEs in the first phase and 238 additional ones starting in 2009.

The project pursued 3 intermediate results:

- Increased access to and improved performance of girls in school
- Improved community contribution to transparent management of the education system.
- Improved response to HIV/AIDS in the basic education sector

4.1 Scope of Work:

Scope of Work and Technical Approach:

The Scope of Work for the evaluation of the GECF project is as follows:

“The contractor/consultant team shall conduct a review of the implementation of the GECF. From this study, the consultant(s) will develop an evaluation report that will be guided by the Technical Approach outlined below. The primary audiences for the evaluation report shall be USAID, Government of Benin, World Education and implementing partners. The contractor will be expected to propose appropriate methodologies for collecting data.”

4.2 Evaluation Questions:

- I. The evaluation will assess the degree to which the GECP achieved its targets by addressing the three primary questions and corresponding sub-questions:
 - If there were significantly varying results between regions in their achievement of the IR, what accounts for those discrepancies?
- II. What effect has the implementation of activities had on gender roles in the community's management of the educational system or in other areas of their life?
 - What initiatives did mothers begin as a result of the project?
 - Have there been changes in perceptions of gender roles?
- III. What is the likely long-term impact of the GECP with respect to the achievement of the activity's Goal and Intermediate Results?
 - Which components and achievements of GECP are most likely to continue after activity termination and why?
 - Are there recommendations or lessons learned that could improve the sustainability of similar activities in the future?

To answer these questions, the consultant team will perform a detailed document review and conduct key informant interviews. The notes below represent suggested directions of inquiry; however, the team will feel free to suggest, pursue, and present findings on additional questions as s/he deems relevant.

4.3 Evaluation Design:

The design relies on a comparative approach, over time (before and after the intervention) and across intervention locations (communes where WE interventions took place compared to communes where none did. In some communes, not all schools were included and the outcomes between schools with intervention are compared with those without it). The time frame starts in 2005, before the onset of the project. It should be noted that communes and communities differed widely in the relevant characteristics at the beginning of the intervention. A comparative frame of reference is appropriate, but differences in the outcomes must not be over-interpreted because the initial conditions in each setting were not measured. Yet, these initial conditions inevitably affect the impact of the interventions.

4.3.1 Access and performance of girls

The analysis relies on beginning of year enrollments in order to make possible the inclusion of the last year of intervention, 2012-13. Differences between the beginning and the end of the school year enrollment numbers can exist, in part because some children start school well after the beginning of the school year. How a late start affects a child's learning is impossible to assess in this evaluation. It is reasonable to suspect that a late start affects learning negatively.

It would be reasonable to expect that enrollment growth would increase as more activities take place. Thus, differences in enrollment should increase between intervention and non-involved areas should increase over time. However, the nature and impact that other socio-economic and cultural variables have on enrollment differs from community to community, and may be more powerful in affecting enrollment and academic performance than any intervention.

4.3.2. Increased Performance of girls

Five indicators are used:

- The **grade repetition rate** for girls. Each school maintains such statistics. They are also available from the MEMP and collected by the project's monitoring team. The rate should decrease over time in the GECP areas.
- **Girls' drop-out rate**. This number is expected to decrease over time.
- A **first grade cohort analysis** is based on the assumption children go on to the next grade each year. Hence, the number of children in the 2nd grade should be very close to the number in the 1st grade the previous year. The survival rate of children in the targeted areas can be compared to the national one.¹¹
- The **evolution of girls' enrollment in the sixth grade** in the targeted and non-targeted areas.

4.3.3. Support for girls' education

The project worked with APEs, AMEs and CAPEs to improve their organizational effectiveness. However, APE membership has been almost exclusively male, which is why GECP spent considerable energy assisting the creation of AMEs. AMEs undertake many different types of activities, some focusing on the **demand** for education (initial recruitment of girls, getting girls back in school, etc.), others on the **supply**, broadly construed to include issues of quality (being able to study in a quiet space, having supplies available, hiring of community teachers, for example). The activities AMEs have engaged in since the project's onset will be examined and the academic outcomes in selected schools will also be examined. The project's monitoring data provides useful evidence on the APE's, CAPE's and AME's success in becoming more effective and in using that effectiveness to improve educational outcomes.

AME activities to boost girls' enrollment include:

- Organization of groups to listen to radio broadcasts
- Census of school age children
- Monitoring attendance
- Talking parents out of early marriage
- Convincing directors to accept girls who have left school

AME activities to reduce financial obstacles include:

¹¹ This analysis assumes that the school population has no in or out migration. If there is in or out migration, the assumption is that one cancels the other. Only a formal panel study would ascertain the correctness of these assumptions.

- Raising funds through economic activities
- Purchasing school supplies
- Donations of personal funds to purchase supplies or uniform

AME activities to reduce cultural barriers:

- Reduction of early marriage by through conversations with parents and involving trusted traditional leaders
- Fight against the idea that girls should not stay in school
- Making birth certificates available that are required to register for exams
- Lobbying religious and other leaders
- Explaining that boys and girls should share household duties

AME activities to facilitate girls' success:

- Informing parents that girls need time to study
- Study halls
- Communicating with teachers
- Lunch programs
- Role models

Project activities to facilitate all of the above:

- Training teachers to sensitize them about girls' special difficulties
- Training in lobbying
- Support to AME activities (fund raising, mini projects)
- Training of APEs, encouragement to women candidates
- Radio programs
- Training in organizational functioning
- Workshops in AIDS awareness
- Training of teachers in multi grade techniques
- Lobbying of national educational leaders

4.3.4. Fair management of the education system

ERO results provide information concerning the APE's adherence to guidelines for co-management (elections of officers, training of officers; resource management) and for effective management of the APE and AME. Trends in ERO scores will be analyzed.

4.3.5. Improved response to HIV/AIDS

Activities aimed at addressing HIV/AIDS include:

- Community awareness campaigns
- Training of individuals to communicate the HIV/AIDS prevention message.

- Improved knowledge and attitudes in schools of HIV/AIDs transmission and what measures can be taken to prevent transmission
- Analysis of monitoring documents provided by partner organization

4.3.6. Improved condition of women

Indicators used to measure improved conditions for women include:

- Women elected to APE board
- Successful activities organized by women, such as raising funds, rescuing a trafficked child, and facilitating the return of a girl who had left school.
- Nature of the relationship between APE and AME (stakeholder interviews)
- Opinions of community leaders concerning the emerging role of women

V. DATA COLLECTION

5.1. Quantitative evidence

A data bank for the years 2005-2006 to 2011-12 was assembled at the commune and school levels. This data bank used numbers collected by the project's monitoring staff as well as the statistical yearbooks published by the Ministry of Primary Education (MEMP). Combining these two sources made it possible to have access to information that preceded the project and to also include the 2012-13 school year (for communes involved in the project only). National statistics are available for 2011-12, but the yearbook provides only enrollment by gender and by grade. The commune data make it possible to distinguish between GECP communes and the others. The same distinction was used in communes where the involvement in GECP was not universal, i.e. schools involved in GECP were compared to schools that were not in the same commune. While simple to report, this procedure required considerable time because of missing data and other issues.¹²

The following indicators were available:

- Enrollment by gender and by grade. At the school level, the data stop in 2010-11 for the schools not included in GECP. Thus, comparisons will not be made over the entire period since data are available till the beginning of 2012-13 for GECP schools, but not for the other schools;
- Grade repetition;
- Dropout rates (from 2008 only)¹³;

¹² Comparisons between the data reported by the midterm evaluation were sometimes identical, sometimes not. In addition, data reported to the project did not always agree with the ministry numbers.

¹³ This statistics is normally reported in the national yearbook, by commune. However, we discovered that, for some years, the data actually corresponded to earlier years. It was not possible to know precisely which year was being reported. Given the purpose, trends over time, this data reporting problem turned out to make the planned analysis impossible.

- Statistical tests are **not** used for two reasons:
 - At the national level, the data concern the entire population.
 - At the commune and local levels, no sampling frame could be used since the decision to include or exclude a commune or a village had been made at the start of the project. The selected schools were purposefully selected and, thus, statistical tests based on a sampling frame cannot be justified.

5.2. Qualitative data:

5.2.1 Selection of the communes

A purposive sample was used, the resources available for the evaluation making other procedures impossible. The evaluation team used several criteria to select the communes and communities for a visit:

- The length of the intervention in the commune
- The time that had elapsed since the end of the intervention
- The nature of the micro-projects selected by the community
- Access: some communities were extremely remote, requiring 90 minutes of travel from the commune. It was impossible to include many of these remote communities.
- The team visited 9 communes (Matéri, Boukombé, Malanville, Kandi, Gogounou, Nikki, Za-Kpota, Djakotomé, Houéyogbé) and 14 communities within them.

5.2.2 Actors in the selected communes

The questionnaires used for each type of actor are included in the appendix.

CAPE board members: interviews were conducted to determine the extent to which the project provided assistance to promote girls' education, their success in school, and fight against the AIDS pandemic and to increase the participation of women in school affairs.

CCS: The commune's chief educational officer was interviewed to ascertain his views of the role played by APEs, and especially AMEs, in their area. These interviews also provided an opportunity to discuss the difficulties schools in his district faced.

Mayor's office: The mayor, or the municipal officer responsible for educational matters, was interviewed. An important part of the conversation centered on the issues of sustainability, i.e. those actions already taken by the municipality to support community involvement activities initiated by the project.

5.2.3 Selected Schools

AMEs and APE board members : AMEs and APEs were separately asked questions concerning their activities, their perception of the results, and the contribution the project made to these

activities. Members were asked questions about their cooperation with the other organization (APE in the case of AME and vice versa) and to assess the attitude of the community towards girls' schooling. Members of the APE and AME were asked about the activities they continued to pursue now that the project had closed. AMEs and APEs also discussed the outcomes of the micro-projects.

School Directors: The school director was asked about his perception of the trends in girls' participation, retention, and success. Participation in HIV/AIDS activities was also discussed. The conversation afforded an opportunity to ascertain the school's condition.

5.2.4 Partners

GECP collaborated with a large number of partners. In some communes, the project complemented the activities of other NGOs, but the exact nature of the participation varied between communes and NGO. In Karimama, for example, the partnership with UNICEF was extensive. UNICEF officials were interviewed at the national headquarters in Cotonou and at the regional level in Parakou. Each of the NGOs responsible for carrying out the field work in the communities was interviewed and their reports examined at WEI headquarters in Parakou.

Interviews were conducted with selected national level partners as well. GECP collaborated with the National Institute for Teacher Training (INFRE), who trained teachers in multi grade teaching. This innovation has important ramifications for girls' school participation and success because multi grade schooling reduces geographical distance and it avoids the problem of alternate year recruitment. The literature on multi grade teaching (used in many countries, rich and poor) shows that it is effective. The head of the department charged with promoting schooling and the head of the Inspectorate responsible for training the APEs were also interviewed.

VI. CAPACITY BUILDING

The qualitative analysis seeks to document the **processes** that made the outcomes possible. Among these is the perception of the many actors themselves. The steps taken by the NGOs, the APEs and AMEs, and the reactions of several kinds of officials (mayors, CCS, school directors particularly) to these steps were ascertained in the many interviews carried out in the field.

6.1. What does an AME do?

An AME is the key player in the project's design. The AME necessarily relies on others, the APE first, but it is the group that carries out many activities that contribute, directly and indirectly, to the attainment of the objectives. They build a strong relationship with the APE, the official link between the community and the parents and the school system. The relationship between the APE and the AME can be described, as one of the respondents did, as a "family" where the father and the mother play complementary roles.

The list of AME activities represents an illustration of what some AMEs have done. The list of what each has done is fairly unique because each AME is free to identify areas of need in their communities and what sort of small project they can do to address it. For example, some selected to construct teacher's housing, others to build classrooms, and some to buy or to repair furniture, or to launch income generating activities. The selection was based on the determination of what would best address a particularly salient community issue. AMEs often elect a board, composed of a President, Vice-President, and other standard roles, though such roles are not a requirement.

Among the many activities, the following were found to be common:

Activities designed to improve schooling conditions

- Carry out censuses of school age children during the summer before the school year begins;
- Share the list of identified school-aged children to the director so he can determine which children can be admitted;
- Clean school grounds before the beginning of the school year;
- Fight against child trafficking or the practice of sending children to traditional socialization ceremonies during the school year;
- Create community canteens (school feeding centers) run by the community;
- Purchase of first aid kits and creation of a fund to renew the supplies;
- Activities to generate income that will be used to purchase school supplies. These activities have taken many forms: a mill to grind corn, a field where corn or other crop is grown and whose products are sold;
- Provide needy children with supplies their parents cannot purchase;
- Build classrooms or housing for teachers;
- Create and operate of day care programs, so that girls who might be required to stay home to care for younger siblings are free to attend school;
- Discuss among members issues concerning the equitable distribution between boys and girls of domestic obligations;
- Visits to the parents of children who have dropped out of school to convince them to send the child back to school;
- Fight against exchange marriages which involve giving a girl to a family that the girl's family owes money to or to show gratitude. Such "gifts" now take the form of an animal being exchanged;
- Organize groups to listen to radio programs dealing with school issues;
- On occasion, AME members wash children who do not come to school clean and they will try to convince the mother that the child's clothing should also be clean.

Activities designed to improve academic success:

- Hold discussions with the APE and the director concerning attendance issues and the academic work of children;

- Ban video clubs during the school year;
- Ensure that all children attend by visiting families that do not send children to school, in order to ascertain whether the child has a valid reason for missing school (illness, family ceremony, for example);
- Create and finance spaces suitable for studying;
- Contribute to the cost of hiring community teachers, often 2 teachers costing about \$ 120 a month total (this is a considerable expense for very poor communities);
- Create awards for the best students, boys and girls;
- Maintain cordial relationships with teachers.

Fight against HIV/AIDS:

- Organize groups to listen to radio programs dealing with HIV/AIDS;
- Participate in workshops organized to increase the awareness of the disease;
- Organize of door to door campaigns to explain the dangers of the disease;
- Hold discussions after training between mothers and daughters concerning risky sexual behavior;
- Hold demonstrations of correct condom usage.

These activities contribute directly to the project's objectives. The AME's contribution goes beyond the project's objectives, however. Reaching the objectives also unleashes other changes whose impact cannot be fully anticipated. Women's roles now include participation in the community's activities. As a group, they can meet, discuss, reach an agreement, and make that point of view known to their communities - and to the APE in particular. Their new strength stems from two sources that are almost universally accepted as legitimate by the community: as mothers, they are responsible for their children's education and education now includes formal schooling.

The expectation that success in school will lead to success in the labor force was frequently referenced by the interviewees. Mention was made of a "retirement benefit" - their daughters would eventually be able to provide for their aging parents if they have been educated and if they are employed.¹⁴ As members stated:

"An educated woman who gets a job will take better care of her parents than a boy will." AME-Dotou-Houéyogbé

"Girls listen more to their mother than to their father. When a girl succeeds, she will help her mother before her father or her in-laws. When a boy succeeds, it's his in-laws who benefit rather than his own mother or father." AME-Dotou-Houéyogbé

¹⁴ The general rule is for the wife to contribute to her husband's family. However, if she has the resources, she can also assist her own family. An educated woman with a job in the formal labor force will thus be better able to contribute to her parents' welfare when they can no longer work.

“AME women pray for their girls’ success. They bring them to school and ensure that they attend and work well because their hope is the success of the girls who will look after them when mothers get old.” *AME-Monkassa-Malanville and AME-Tchankpéhoun-Matéri*

“AME women would themselves have gone to school if such awareness had existed when they were young and they would become cabinet members or other women in high positions. They now dream that it will be like that for their daughters!” *AME-Ouriyori-Matéri*

Self-interest is clearly involved, as are parental aspirations for their children’s future.

Another area AMEs get involved in is health, an involvement that is totally consistent with taking care of children. Malaria is endemic in Benin and children are particularly affected.

“When a child gets sick, the parent informs the AME which handles the distribution of anti-malaria pills.” *AME-Dikouténi-Boukombé*

This concern for health extends to HIV/AIDS.

“Health before all. Places where baptisms take place are very strategic locations to run our awareness campaigns against HIV by showing pictures.” *AME-Molla-Malanville*

By discharging this obligation with enthusiasm, diligence and competence, women’s status in the community increases. Members of the AMEs report telling their daughters that they did not have the chance to be educated and that, if the daughters do not go to school, they will also experience the same harsh life. One member summarized the views of many when she declared:

“Before GECP, AMEs did not exist. Women did not even come to the school. Today, they participate in the life of the school. They take part in the fight against HIV/AIDS. The activities will continue after the end of the project following the training GECP provided”.

Some AMEs meet on a specific day, others when problems arise. They, or a committee of members, are responsible for monitoring attendance, diligence on the part of the students, and good grades. They communicate with the APE board and also with the director. Problems are not allowed to fester. They are well-informed about the school and the teachers. For example, they know how many teachers are missing, how many community teachers have been hired and how much these teachers are paid. Members of the APE report that they could not discharge all their obligations without the active involvement of the AME.

This newly acquired respect and status is slowly being translated onto election to APE boards. Their number did not exceed 3 in the visited communities and none were key members of the board (president, vice-president, for example). Because of that very limited access to the most important board positions, they cannot be elected as members of the CAPE board, the body that sits at the commune level and federates all the commune’s APEs. They cannot go beyond their community of residence to share their experience, even though some visits to neighboring communities have taken place. Their new status is real and based on tangible accomplishments that are acknowledged by all actors, including the CCS, the chief education officer in a commune.

That new status is the consequence of essential, practical activities that lead to recommendations and action. Yet, AME members who are elected to the APE board have not yet captured any real formal power, even though, informally, their influence is undeniable. AME members are well aware of the changes that have taken place. As one member put it:

“A woman has the right to monitor the children. It begins here (in the school) but it also travels to the house. Nothing is decided between men only now.”

Their influence, therefore, has increased significantly and contributed to what has been accomplished.

6.2 The Relationship between APE and AME

We asked both APE board members and AME whether conflict has occurred between the two organizations. There never was any hesitation in the answers: an emphatic “no”, this emphatic “no” was echoed by the APEs as well. These statements were corroborated by the school directors who would know if a conflict had existed. The absence of conflict needs to be explained, for it is not obvious that two groups seeking common goals never will have a significant disagreement.

One partial answer to this absence of conflict stems from the division of labor: men have their sphere of influence and women theirs. Both must take the other into consideration, a new phenomenon in a society where men held virtually all the power. Because women contribute to the common good in undisputable ways, men are compelled to take into account the views of the people who will actually do a good part of the work. When something is being built, such as teachers’ housing, women fetch the water and the sand, and the men build. This adheres to traditional practices. Not threatening the boundaries of the traditional division of labor reduces the probability of conflict. Yet, each group can appreciate the other’s contribution and derive satisfaction from having accomplished something important.

Another partial answer stems from the culture. A woman could not speak publicly because her statements might embarrass her husband. Thus, women had little opportunity to practice public speaking, indeed to imagine that such behavior was possible. In the AME, women get a chance to practice among themselves. Indeed, the evaluation team was impressed not only by the large number of women who came for the interview, but also by how many raised their hand and spoke, often at length. When a spokeswoman makes the AME’s decision public, she will do so as a representative of the collective group, not as an individual. Here again, customs are maintained, or slightly modified in ways that do not offend.

The interviews with the many AME members yield the overwhelming impression of a group of motivated, effective persons who are taking their children’s future into their hands when assistance is available and who are willing to add to their considerable workload to make change happen. Some mentioned that some of their daughters were enrolled in the lower secondary despite the considerable costs secondary school attendance entails. These girls could have provided significant assistance to their mother, or they could have married. Participation in the AMEs is certainly not free of cost to mothers. The following statements illustrate this point.

“AME women lighten girls’ home duties so they can study and come to school on time.”

“Domestic chores have been reduced so girls can go to school. Girls are no longer expected to take care of the small children. Their mother put small children on their back and the girl goes to school.” *AME-Ouriyori-Matéri*

“Equity must prevail, at home and in school. Girls must not be the only ones who work at home. It is an important apprenticeship. Students must not be overburdened because it interferes with their studies. That’s true for girls and for boys.”

6.3 What does the APE do?

This organization is formally mandated by the GOB to co-manage schools, along with school directors and MEMP officials. In many cases APEs were no longer very active before GECP came on the scene. APEs are the principal AME partner. It is the officially acknowledged body that represents parents. Membership is reserved to community members who have a child, or a grandchild, enrolled in school. In practice, that includes essentially every member of the community. The APE seeks to facilitate the AME’s activities. Decisions are jointly made during meetings where parents, men and women, seek a consensus and a way of implementing their decisions.

6.4 What does the CAPE do?

This structure federates the entire commune’s APE. It is an elected body whose members are board members in school-level APEs. One CAPE member represents a specific commune’s area. This organization now accepts that AMEs have become an important component of a school and it cooperates with local APE and AME. CAPE also initiates activities designed to foster participation and success in school as well as the fight against HIV/AIDS. The CAPE is particularly well placed to lobby the CCS, for example to have teachers assigned where there are vacancies or to discipline teachers who violate norms. Because AMEs are well informed and vocal, and because their voice is listened to, cases of misbehavior are known and the CCS will find it difficult to ignore such reports. There are cases, however, when even outrageous behavior by teachers is tolerated because of the protection afforded by powerful politicians or union leaders. (see WEI quarterly report No. 10, for example).

The AME, APE and CAPE are emanations of the community and GECP sought to improve their organizational effectiveness. While these three organizations were the focus of the activities, a number of other actors could have thwarted the project’s efforts. Their cooperation, as well as their enthusiastic response to the project’s endeavor, played an essential role in the success AMEs have experienced.

6.5 What does the school director do?

The school director is the person charged with the school's leadership and is an essential APE partner, in particular in matters of budgetary decisions. Directors welcome the AME's contribution to the school. None of the interviewees reported having doubts about the value, or necessity, of that contribution. It would be difficult for the director to ignore the recommendations of the APE (hence of the AME) in important areas. If a disagreement arises, the issue is communicated to the CCS or the CAPE. The director of the schools where multi-grade teaching was introduced played a key role in making that initiative possible. This is a case where WEI went beyond a narrow definition of its mandate. With USAID's approval, INFRE (the ministry's unit responsible for training) developed a training program for teachers and carried out the training. Multi-grade teaching is particularly appropriate to rural areas because it makes it possible to run a school near residence areas. Multi-grade teaching requires special training. It should be noted that the curriculum developed by INFRE has now been introduced in the formal initial teacher training.

6.6 What does the CCS do?

The CCS is the head of all schools in the commune. This position is simultaneously a leader in pedagogical matters, assisted by several Pedagogical Advisers (CPs) who are responsible for the schools in a specific geographical zone, and the administrative head as well. CCS played an essential role in making it possible for GECF activities to take place. All interviewees were well aware of the AME's contribution, even if they had been appointed after the beginning of the project.

Because they are responsible for leading a large number of schools, they appreciated what AMEs have been able to do, for example building housing for teachers who, otherwise, might have to live very far and thus often be late to school, or not report for duty at all. They also appreciated the willingness of the community to hire community teachers. The CCS must approve the candidates, but has no budget for that purpose.

6.7 What does the municipality do?

In an effort to increase community participation in the educational system, Benin has allocated certain activities to the elected municipal council, led by a mayor. A mayor is elected from among the elected councilors. All communes are expected to write a development plan that always emphasizes education. The municipality is responsible for the construction and maintenance of buildings. It plays no role in hiring or supervising teachers.

The interviews with the first deputy (the person usually selected by the mayor to supervise and coordinate educational issues) revealed that these individuals were very aware of AMEs' activities and contributions. In Malanville, the municipality has bought a motorcycle so that the former coordinator of the NGO that assisted the AMEs could continue supervising them, but on a significantly less intense basis than when the project was in full swing. This person was

remunerated by the municipality. In addition, the CAPE was given the motorcycle previously used by the NGO so it could visit schools and stay fully abreast of issues facing schools within the commune.

These are some of the comments made by the mayor or deputy mayor:

“After training, they got more involved in the school. They managed to increase the girls’ awareness (concerning schooling). In my village, kidnappings have decreased and they have become rare. In 2008, it had been a disaster!” *Boukombé*

“AMEs have been more important than the APEs. It was a notable contribution to girls’ schooling. All children are now in school and all schools are involved.” *Matéri*

“AMEs work better than the APEs and they collect money to support local initiatives in order to improve school conditions and monitoring what children do.” *Matéri*

“If the investment made in the APE had been made on the AME, schools today would be far better off.” *Deputy-Mayor Kandi*

“Any woman works for her child’s success where polygamy is prevalent. AMEs are well equipped for an improved parents’ participation in the running of the school.” *Deputy-Mayor Kandi*

“With the AME, women speak. AMEs free women.” *Deputy-Mayor Gogounou*

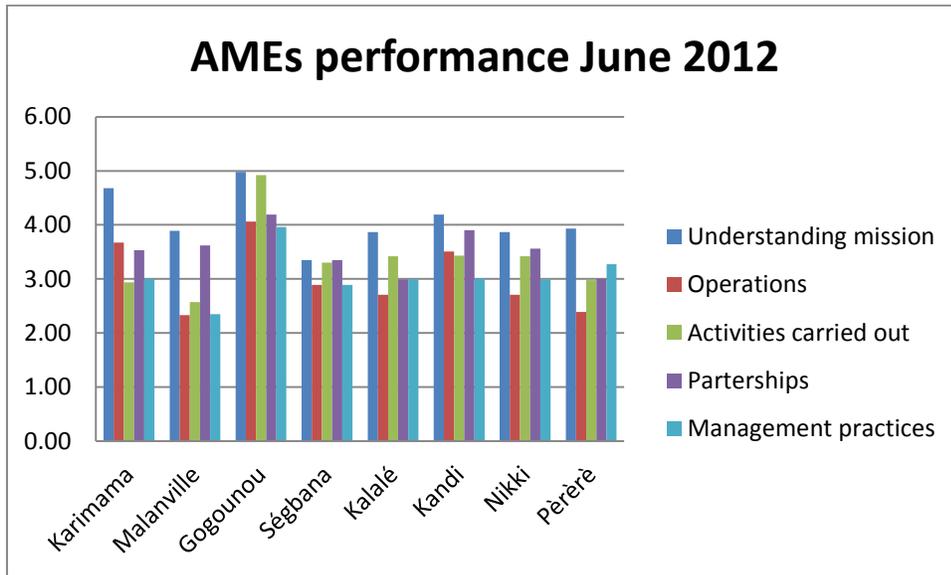
“AMEs carry messages more easily and they must now be helped.” *General secretary Malanville*

6.1. Good Governance and Educational Success

GECP monitored the performance of AMEs, APEs and CAPE approximately every six months. To assess progress, the project relied on ERO, an instrument used in other projects that is designed to assess the extent to which organizations adhere to certain practices, for example whether they regularly hold elections or whether members understand the organization’s mission. In June 2012, 8 communes were still involved in the project and their organizational performance was as follows:¹⁵

¹⁵ ERO relies on the testimony of key actors who respond to identical questions. Their answers are summarized into a score, 5 being the maximum.

Graph 2: AMEs performance June 2012



Source: GECP monitoring

The graph reveals differences between AMEs, with AME Gogounou functioning at a high level, but with AME Malanville operating at a generally lower level. Nevertheless, despite these differences, the mean performance levels reached a satisfactory level.

A similar survey was done for all APes and the average results computed:

Table 1: Averages and Modes of all GECP APE

Indicators	Mean	Mode
1-01 Knowledge of APE mission	4,3	4
2.01 APE possesses its statutes	4,0	4
2.02 APE possesses internal rules	5,0	5
2.03 Term limits are respected	3,7	3
2-04 Election methods are respected	5,0	5
2-05 Agreement concerning co-management exists	2,0	2
3-01 APE board is legitimate	2,7	2
3-02 Board includes women	2,7	2
4-01 membership meetings take place	4,3	5
4-02 Board holds statutory meetings	3,0	2
4-03 Treasurer fulfills duties	2,3	1
4-04 Board members know their duties	3,3	3
4-05 List of members exists	5,0	5
4-06 List of members exists	3,3	#N/A
4-07 Documents APE are well organized	3,0	2
4-08 Director attends meetings	5,0	5
4-09 APE has a budget	1,0	1
4-10 Report concerning activities exists	1,7	1
5-01 Strategic plan exists	2,0	2
5-02 Education development plan exists	2,0	2
6-01 Board monitors educational issues	3,3	3
6-02 board monitors schooling progress	3,0	3
6-03 Board controls funds given the director	1,0	1
6-04 Good behavior document has been signed	2,0	2

This table shows a generally favorable level of performance (5 is the maximum score), although the budget is not as frequently available as is considered desirable. This is also the case for the monitoring of funds given the director to purchase supplies approved by the board. The same difficulties concerning finances can be observed in the low level of activity by the treasurer. Finance appears to be an area where significant progress needs to be made. Though, it should be noted that the appointment of district level accountants created some confusion. The appointment of these accountants (selected from among teachers who had a secondary level accounting degree with a specialization in accounting) led many boards to conclude that they no longer had a role to play in the decisions concerning the spending of the state subsidy. This represented a change in the previous official policy which states unambiguously that the board and the director made joint financial decisions. WEI asked for clarification and the Minister wrote a letter confirming the old policy concerning the board's and the director's roles. Accountants actually carry out the purchase and keep the records, but they only carry out the

board and director's decisions. Some directors, asked about this relatively new practice, reported being satisfied with the new arrangement because it frees them from financial transactions which are often problematic. It is worth observing that ERO captured the problem, showing that it is a valid indicator of governance.

VII. QUANTITATIVE OUTCOMES

The quantitative analysis seeks to determine whether girls' access to school and their academic success has improved in the communes that benefitted from the intervention. We emphasize here again that the initial condition in the community is unknown and, therefore, that the findings must be interpreted with caution. ERO provides evidence on the improvement in governance.

The quantitative results are the consequence of the many conditions in the community and these interact with the components of the intervention. Given the variety of each of these conditions, it is not surprising that the outcomes exhibit significant differences. The project's activities are intended to launch a process whereby mothers, formerly excluded from participation in the school, become involved. They learn new skills and the usage of these newly acquired skills is intended to unleash their potential and to affect change.

While achieving gender parity in school enrollment was not a goal of the GECP project, examining changes in gross enrollment rates for girls in comparison to boys, in the absence of more rigorous evaluation methods, allows us to see whether or not the barriers to schooling that are specific to girls have been changing. In the target communes in the north of Benin, families have traditionally chosen to send boy children to school over girls; if the gap between girls' enrollment rates and boys' appears to be closing, one can assume that more families are choosing to send their daughters to school.

6.1. Gross Enrollment Rate

To determine the extent to which all eligible children are enrolled, we examine the Gross Enrollment Rate (GER). This statistic is problematic in Benin because the denominator, the school age population, is estimated on the basis of the 2002 census. The reliability of that number is unknown. Moreover, the children's exact age is not always precisely known. The numerator is less problematic since it involves the children actually enrolled in school.

Table 2: Progression of Gross Enrollment Rates 2007-2011

Districts	GER boys 2007	GER girls 2007	GER boys 2011	GER girls 2011	Evolution Boys GER	Evolution Girls GER	Rank in 2007-2008	Rank in 2011-2012	Improvement
GOGOUNOU	47%	65%	61%	84%	29%	30%	70	66	+4
KANDI	70%	78%	83%	95%	19%	22%	60	68	-8
KARIMAMA	48%	34%	66%	46%	36%	36%	77	77	0
MALANVILLE	52%	44%	67%	57%	29%	29%	76	76	0
SEGBANA	53%	56%	66%	72%	26%	29%	74	73	+1
BOUKOUMBE	87%	64%	103%	82%	19%	28%	71	68	+3
COBLY	103%	61%	140%	102%	36%	68%	73	53	+20
MATERI	91%	66%	120%	103%	32%	55%	68	51	+17
KALALE	54%	62%	64%	81%	18%	30%	72	69	+3
NIKKI	69%	65%	78%	78%	14%	19%	69	71	-2
PERERE	105%	96%	115%	121%	9%	27%	46	27	19
APLAHOUE	134%	107%	135%	110%	1%	3%	26	41	-15
DJAKOTOME	136%	107%	131%	108%	-4%	0%	28	45	-17
HOUEYOGBE	158%	150%	159%	159%	1%	6%	8	7	+1
LOKOSSA	179%	152%	183%	159%	3%	4%	7	8	-1
ZA-KPOTA	126%	100%	123%	107%	-3%	6%	37	47	-10
Benin	104%	92%	114%	107%	9%	16%			

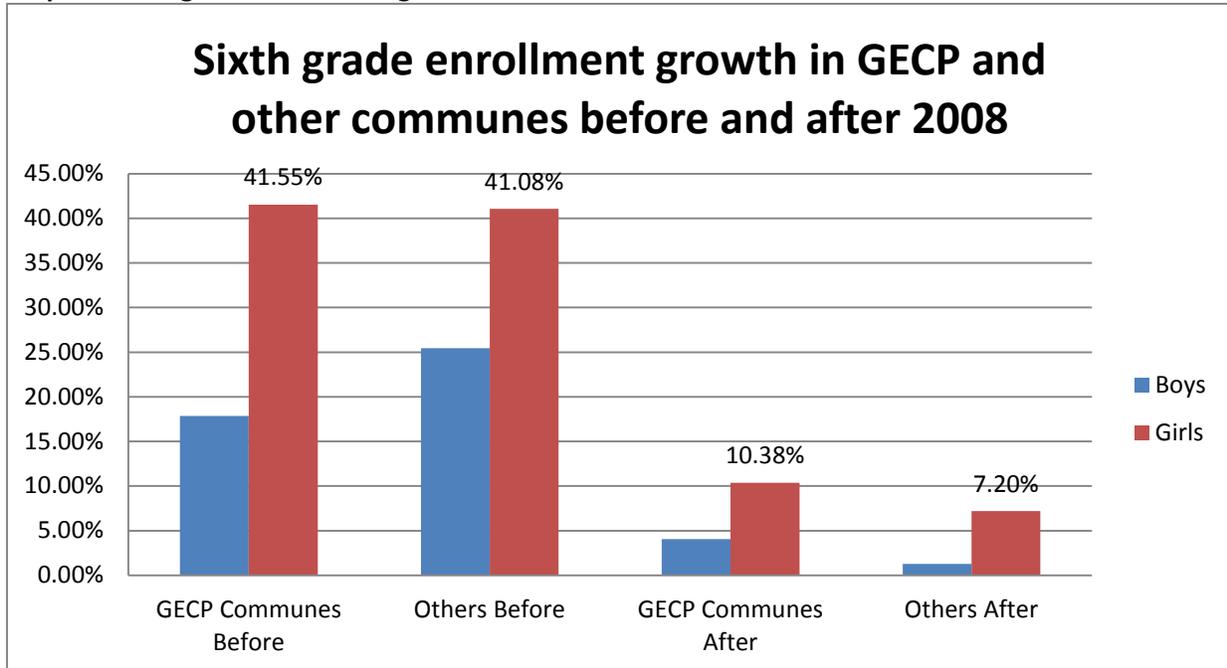
Red: below national average. Green: growth higher than national average

The average difference between the girls' GER and the boys' was 8% in the early period as well as in the more recent one. The table above shows very large differences between communes. It is worth noting that two communes saw their GER decrease. The communes with low GER experienced a high rate of growth, spectacular in the case of Coby and Materi, whose relative ranking rose between 2007-08 and 2011-12.

A number of GER remain very low (46% in Karimama, 57% in Malanville for the recent period). Generally, a high boys' rate is associated with a high girls' rate. This suggests that school attendance represents a norm, meaning a practice that is adhered to both by boys and girls, the norm affecting boys first and girls later.

The GERs presented above pertain to the entire school population. One important objective of GECP involved girls and their ability to complete the primary cycle, the sixth grade in Benin. The following graph presents the enrollments trends for the sixth grade in GECP communes compared to the others.

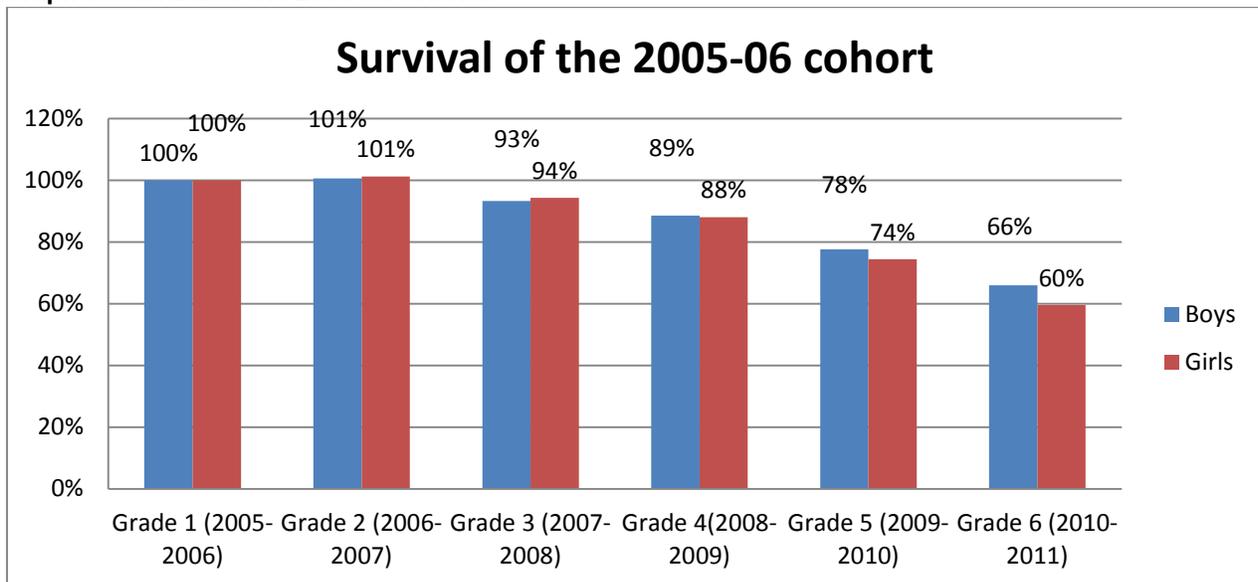
Graph 2: Sixth grade enrollment growth in GECP and other communes before and after 2008



6.1.1. Staying in school

Under normal conditions, children enter the first grade (sometimes as young as 4 in Benin), and progress through one grade every year. Thus, all children who start the first grade should complete the sixth grade 5 years later. That is of course an ideal situation. It is instructive to compute what percentage of an entering cohort actually reaches the sixth grade 5 years after starting school.

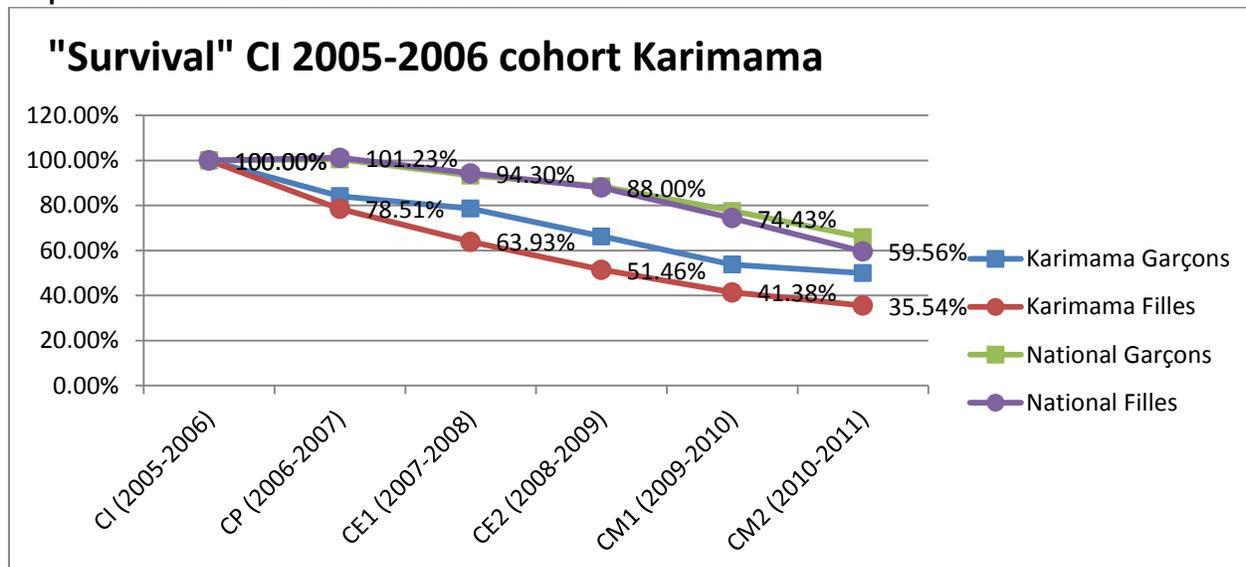
Graph 3: Survival of the 2005-06 cohorts



This data show that 60% of girls on the average reach the sixth grade 5 years after starting school while 66% of boys do at the national level.

Variations between communes are very large.

Graph 4: "Survival" CI 2005-2006 cohort Karimama



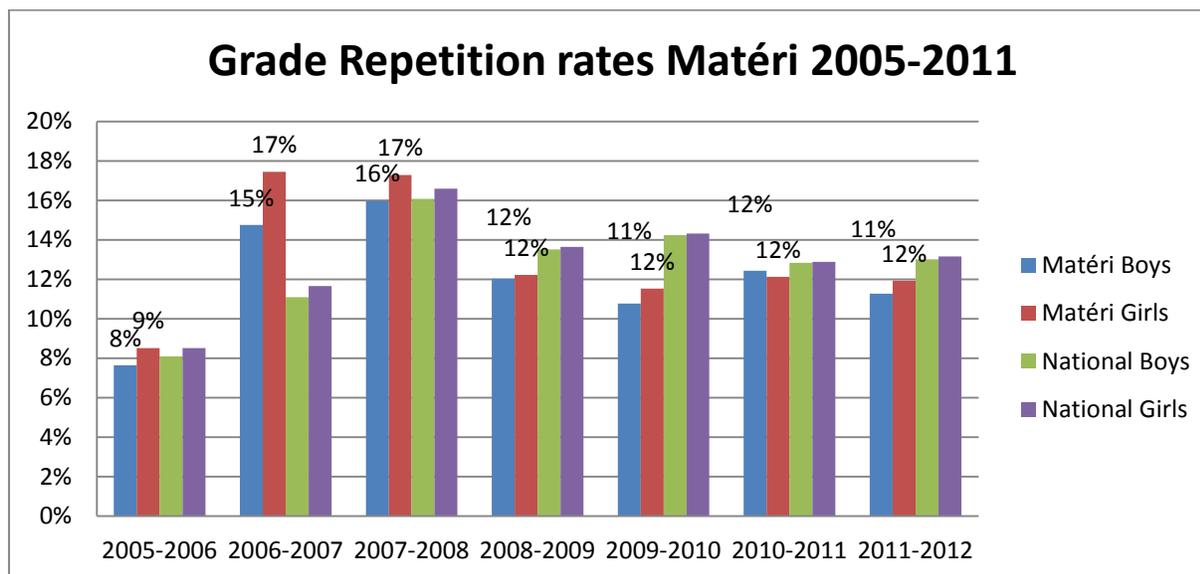
In Karimama, 36% of girls who started in the first grade reach the sixth grade while the national percentage is 60%. In Boukombé, that number is 46%, a number close to that of Cobly.

The cohort analysis shows that a substantial proportion of girls, the majority in some areas, do not reach the sixth grade in a timely fashion. The overall trend, nationally and in the communes, is for the proportion of girls to diminish in the fifth and fall even more in the sixth grade. Grade repetition can compensate somewhat so that the percentage of girls eventually reaching the sixth grade is higher than the figures presented here. Nevertheless, given the opportunity costs of schooling and the cultural preference for marriage to take place shortly after puberty, girls will be encouraged to leave school if they become “too old”. Being “too old” represents a cultural norm and there are indications that this norm is evolving. AMEs played a role in convincing reluctant parents that staying in school long enough to obtain the CEP (national exam that sanctions the end of the primary cycle) offers important advantages.

6.2. Grade Repetition and drop- out rates

Grade repetition and drop-out rates are related. Telling a child that he or she must repeat the grade sends a strong signal that performance has not been satisfactory. Parents for whom attendance is new may conclude that the child is not suited for school. Moreover, an additional year of schooling generates significant opportunity costs and that additional year does not guarantee success. Thus, the child may drop out. This is particularly true for a girl, whose labor is valuable to the household and who is expected to marry relatively early. Staying in school is not yet considered compatible with married life and, thus, girls are more likely to drop-out than boys.

Graph 5: Grade Repetition rates Materi 2005-2011



Grade repetition rates for girls are very similar to those of boys. In 2007-08, the grade repetition increased and remained at the 12% level for girls and 11% for boys after that date.

Variations between communes are high, but in grade repetition, there seems to be a national norm, even if it is a norm that allows some variations between geographical areas.

Table 3: Drop-out rates by communes

Drop outs	2008-2009		2011-2012		Change 2008-2011	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
Gogounou	9,71%	11,47%	22,47%	19,86%	12,76%	8,39%
Kandi	14,98%	13,86%	12,68%	14,11%	-2,30%	0,25%
Karimama	36,07%	30,32%	29,01%	26,46%	-7,06%	-3,86%
Malanville	14,19%	9,45%	17,98%	18,34%	3,79%	8,89%
Segbana	11,09%	8,62%	6,92%	1,71%	-4,17%	-6,91%
Boukombé	15,87%	17,61%	23,61%	18,96%	7,74%	1,35%
Cobly	21,96%	15,34%	27,61%	21,71%	5,65%	6,37%
Matéri	6,20%	3,75%	22,32%	12,98%	16,12%	9,23%
Kalalé	12,62%	13,18%	20,92%	18,73%	8,30%	5,55%
Nikki	13,80%	12,17%	13,34%	12,09%	-0,46%	-0,08%
Perere	11,08%	11,42%	19,39%	17,88%	8,31%	6,46%
Aplahoué	16,17%	14,00%	22,98%	20,00%	6,81%	6,00%
Djakotomey	14,69%	9,14%	19,08%	15,74%	4,39%	6,60%
Houéyogbé	14,14%	10,86%	14,83%	12,86%	0,69%	2,00%
Lokossa	10,13%	6,99%	19,57%	18,96%	9,44%	11,97%
Za-Kpota	12,99%	12,56%	22,55%	10,23%	9,56%	-2,33%
Mean	14,73%	12,55%	19,70%	16,29%		

Bold: decrease in the drop-out rates.

On average, 15% of girls drop out at any time and that number is 13% for boys, not a large difference. The percentage of children who drop out has increased in recent years: 20% for girls and 16% for boys on average. This suggests that, with increased enrollments, some students, girls more than boys, experience difficulties in school and eventually drop-out. Karimama experienced the highest drop-out rate with 29% and Segbana the lowest with 7% for girls and 2% for boys.

The very poor learning conditions that prevail in many of the communes are poor: according to the CCS all districts in that area are experiencing significant teacher shortages and parents may simply not see the advantage of sending children to school when no teacher is present. If one assumes an average of 40 students in a classroom and if 100 teachers are not available, 4000 children in that commune are learning under very unfavorable conditions, hence more likely to drop out. Some communities are able to hire teachers they pay themselves, but not all communities can afford such a large expense, even if community teachers receive low pay. The teacher shortage is not the only obstacle: lack of classrooms and books are also prevalent.

VIII. INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL LEVEL ANALYSIS

The previous analyses focused on the communes. Yet, many AME activities take place at the individual school level. The analysis at the individual school level had been planned, but the data turned out to be difficult to obtain, despite the monitoring team's considerable efforts. Another reason is that, when a school reaches a certain size, a new one is created. Thus, school enrollments reach a maximal size and then no longer grow. That is why more attention has been devoted to the commune level: enrollments are allowed to grow "normally" without a ceiling effect.

The enrollment trends among the schools the evaluation team visited were analyzed and that analysis turned out to yield results whose interpretation is not obvious, possibly because the numbers were not reliable.

CONCLUSION

Girls' enrollment continued to increase after 2008, but at a slower rate than during previous years, when school fees in primary school were eliminated. Enrollments in the sixth grade grew faster in the GECP intervention areas than in the others.

Grade repetition in the GECP areas remained close to the national averages. The dropout rates increased, with some exceptions. Very large differences in the GER between the communes remained. Generally, the GER was much improved in the Northern communes; indeed their rate of improvement generally surpassed the national growth average. However, the GERs remained at relatively low levels.

At the individual community level, where most of the activities took place, the results are highly variable, although the trend is towards a more favorable indicators of increased access to

education for girls. The time and data available did not allow for a detailed statistical analysis of the community level results. Such an analysis would be desirable, although the possibility of creating an uninterrupted time series is low.

The generalization of schooling, particularly for girls, can meet very diverse conditions that favor, or hinder, success. School conditions are highly variable. When enrollment grows, the additional children can sometimes be fairly easily accommodated in one school while, in another, an already very difficult situation is made worse. In addition, the availability of teachers is variable and some communities can manage to hire and pay community teachers, but others are not able to.

This preliminary conclusion suggests that it would be useful for the local NGO whose staff knows the situation well and who visited the community frequently to explore the likely causes of the differences between communities. The absence of teachers is known, for example and so is the availability and quality of space. The project's objectives did not include working with the schools themselves, which is a task of the GOB. The midterm evaluation recommended that a more elaborate monitoring system be created and that was done. It turned out that many of the most basic evidence, such as enrollment numbers, were difficult to obtain from the CS in a timely fashion. It should also be noted that ministry and local numbers often differed significantly. A possible solution would be to have a project monitor a sample of the schools. That, however, would increase the cost. By contrast, the monitoring that fell under the project's exclusive purview, ERO and EAF, turned out to be useful tools that measured change in organizational capacity of APEs and AMEs. Indeed, the evidence shows that objectives that depended on the GECP activities were reached. Substantial progress was made in girls' access and retention, even spectacular progress in some cases. That progress represents the confluence of many factors outside GECP's responsibilities.

IX. INTERPRETATION OF THE EVIDENCE

8.1. Reconciliation of the findings

After a lengthy examination of the quantitative evidence, the field work, and an examination of the notes taken during the interviews, we conclude that the project achieved its anticipated results. The outcomes involving parental involvement are particularly positive. The AME movement is here to stay, and that constitutes a major accomplishment. We argue that these results are strong because of the context in which they were reached.

8.2. The context

The first graph presented in this report showed rapid enrollment growth and we argued that such rapid growth inevitably creates significant organizational problems.

Teacher shortage is one such difficulty and that shortage affects not only attendance, but also retention and success. It is beyond the scope of this report to discuss educational

policies, but the shortage of teachers and infrastructure creates difficult conditions for all educational actors and these shortages affect retention and success.

Besides the difficulties created by the many types of shortages, the cultural context must also be acknowledged as yet another source of difficulty. Attending school, especially for girls, is relatively new in the Northern part of Benin and it is only recently that childhood has come to include school attendance. Education has been “sold” to families and communities, and the success of that “sale” has been remarkable. Yet, there are pockets of resistance, passive at least. Parents are mostly illiterate and that implies being unfamiliar with the obligations school attendance entails (AMEs are playing an active role in familiarizing families with these obligations). It is all the more remarkable that illiterate women now understand that schooling involves more than mere attendance. AMEs have clearly played a role in spreading that message. Roles have changed, but some traditional elements necessarily remain.

WEI actually harnessed some of these constraints by convincing religious and traditional leaders to promote girls’ education.

Lastly, physical barriers in much of rural Benin can also be assumed to have had an impact on enrollments. Some areas have very poor roads and experience flooding which makes access impossible at certain times of the year. Teachers are often reluctant to accept assignments in areas that are cut off from the rest of the country for extended periods.

These difficulties cannot entirely be overcome and they reduce the ability of a project to reach its objectives, especially within just two years. That is a very short time to attain ambitious goals. Moreover, the NGOs responsible for carrying out the day-to-day training and monitoring experienced staff turnover, an unavoidable phenomenon given that these people are educated and seek professional opportunities whenever they are offered. The pursuit of higher degrees, or employment in other fields, inevitably creates a turnover that can affect the staff’s effectiveness.

Thus, when assessing the success of the project, it is essential to take account of these real difficulties. It is indeed noteworthy that two years after the end of the project, AMEs are still partnering with APEs and are still carrying a census of school-age children, monitoring their attendance and their success. Women for whom discussion of sexual matters were still taboo only a few years ago now demonstrate the usage of condoms. Most fundamentally, despite a culture that limited the influence of women, AMEs have become a force to be reckoned with and we now turn to the many services they might render to their communities.

X. ANSWERS TO THE SCOPE OF WORK

XI. Of all of the interventions used in the project, which were effective in achieving the Goal and Intermediate Results of GECF?

The creation of the AMEs and their ability to partner with the APEs have been enormously effective. That effectiveness was reinforced by the “practices” the project included in its design: joint decision-making, conducting activities, building together, allocating responsibilities to committees. APEs increased their effectiveness by monitoring the outcomes of their activities and becoming more knowledgeable board members. A significant number of activities continue to be performed in schools that participated in GECF, even long after GECF-support has ended.

XII. If there were significantly varying results between regions in their achievement of the IR, what accounts for those discrepancies?

The results are very diverse, but trends in outcomes exhibit a similar pattern. That diversity stems in part from the history of schooling in the community and the mode of production (e.g. boys work in the cotton fields and tend the animals in certain communes). The level of poverty is also a factor. Very poor communities find it difficult not only to hire and pay community teachers, but also to forgo the immediate financial benefits of keeping children home to assist with household and farm tasks. Opportunity costs are likely to be higher in very poor communities. Another important source of variations can be found in the educational system itself: in more rural areas teachers often are not assigned and even when they are, they do not necessarily report for duty; and teachers are often late, and lacking in motivation. Teaching conditions vary greatly as well. The project had no control over these conditions.

XIII. What effect has the implementation of activities had on gender roles in the community’s management of the educational system or in other areas of their life?

All testimonies speak of the new roles women are now able to play. Women are involved in the daily life of the school in ways that APEs are not and that involvement has tangible results. Women’s contribution enhances their status and they use their new influence to bring about more change. It is no accident that many activities that require time, but not funding, are continuing after the end of the project. APE board members reported appreciation for women’s contributions and many forcefully argued that they simply could not get as much done for the school or the students without the women’s contribution.

XIV. What initiatives did mothers begin as a result of the project?

Many examples are listed in the report. The most spectacular involve AME-led projects that took many forms, such as building teachers’ housing and engaging in income-producing activities in order to purchase school supplies. Mothers’ frequent (sometimes daily) involvement in school affairs constitutes an important development.

XV. Have there been changes in perceptions of gender roles?

Absolutely, but the changes are not shocking to the population because they build upon traditional norms that make women responsible for children's education. Changes involve formal education of children becoming a mother's responsibility, and women becoming partners of the APEs through the AMEs. The activities fall within acceptable cultural limits, but they bring a new status to women whose voice can more readily be heard.

XVI. What is the likely long-term impact of the GECP with respect to the achievement of the activity's Goal and Intermediate Results?

The impact, so far, has been substantial and promises to last because mothers' commitment to a better life for their children will not disappear. The AMEs see a direct connection between their involvement and the goals they seek for their children. Moreover, there is an amount self interest in their motivation: educated children have more income potential and will be better able to care for their aging parents. Idealism and pragmatism reinforce each other in this instance.

XVII. Which components and achievements of GECP are most likely to continue after activity termination and why?

All components not requiring financial resources are likely to continue. With the AMEs existing independently of GECP, they are also likely to be an entrance point to communities for other donors and projects.

XVIII. Are there recommendations or lessons learned that could improve the sustainability of similar activities in the future?

The project has documented that it is possible to change women's role to become effective partners with male community leaders, increasing availability of education and likelihood of success possible for a larger proportion of students—particularly girls, whose participation in school has historically been low in the selected communities. The project also showed that it is possible to harness the forces of tradition (using a participatory approach) to affect change. The areas where the project operated are very poor and in need of additional external support. That support could harness the AMEs to engage in income-producing activities, improve health, and protect the environment.

XIX. LESSONS LEARNED

We contend that WEI, an organization that has developed an enviable reputation in the Northern part of the country (many unsolicited comments attest to the high regard WEI enjoys),

has used its considerable expertise and commitment to bring about results. The usage of NGOs is an effective method that brings benefits beyond the actual organization and execution of the project's activities.

Most of these NGOs do not have the organizational capacity to run large, foreign funded programs and therefore the involvement of an organization such as WEI remains important.¹⁶ The AMEs could be used in many other areas besides education, although their role in that sphere is essential.

Among many possibilities, the possible contribution of AMEs in the following areas could be considered:

- Extending the AMEs to lower secondary education, given that the transition to the secondary is problematic in all countries and girls need special protection when they enter the 7th and higher grades.
- Involvement in health issues (fight against malaria, improved nutrition, hygiene and public health)
- Using AMEs and APEs as examples of the importance of good governance in development. AMEs and APEs could become case studies in civic education.
- Using AMEs to organize school feeding programs could provide income possibilities, both as producers of food, and as organizers.

The possible usage of parental involvement in educational governance should be cognizant of the limitations of such an approach. Women are still mostly illiterate and thus remain dependent upon literate members of the community and upon men. That is where the broadening of the AME approach to secondary education might help since secondary AMEs would probably include educated women. Whether educated women would have the same enthusiasm and would work as diligently as members of the primary AMEs is unknown.

If projects relying on the significant involvement of women are launched, they should last longer than two years and plan for a gradual reduction of the project's involvement during the 3d year.

The success of many development activities depends heavily on the enthusiastic and effective cooperation of government officials. Perhaps local officials could become strong partners now that they have seen what communities can accomplish. Strengthening the sometimes timid decentralization efforts could assist local communities in harnessing the considerable energy of local actors.

¹⁶ A senior UNICEF official commented that her organization had tried bypassing an international NGO and that it had produced unfavorable results. Of all the NGOs we interviewed, only one seems to possess the appropriate management structure and experience to adhere to high standards of record keeping and accountability. That same NGO reported, however, that the fee was insufficient to run a truly professional organization, for example one that pays fringe benefits and that has the necessary resources to foster the staff's professional development;

XX. RECOMMENDATIONS

The accomplishments of AMEs and APEs have been considerable. These accomplishments have taken many forms, but have focused on educational issues, or more precisely on changing the conditions that impede participation and success in the educational system by all children.

Many problems will continue to confront the educational system in Benin and it would be desirable for AMEs and APEs to continue receiving external support. The partnerships they developed could be strengthened, in particular with local government. Such strengthening would harness the AME and APE's considerable potential, but the objectives should be relatively modest because local government is still young in Benin.

INSTRUMENTS

EVALUATION DU PROJET PROJET COMMUNAUTÉS EN ACTION POUR L'ÉDUCATION DES FILLES (CAEF)

AME

VERSION 3

1. Membres présents :

Position :

- a. 1.
- b. 2.
- c. 3.

2. Qui est membre de l'AME ?

3. Avez-vous des élections ?

4. A main levée ou utilisez-vous une autre méthode ?

5. Quelle est la fréquence de vos réunions ?

6. Quels étaient les thèmes des 2 dernières réunions ?

7. Quelles ont été les deux activités de l'AME les plus importantes de cette année scolaire ?

8. Avez-vous un plan d'action ?

9. Comment élaborer vos plans d'action ?

10. Quelle est votre appréciation de la formation que vous a donnée (ONG) ?

11. Justifiez cette appréciation.

12. Avez-vous eu occasion de faire connaître les AME à d'autres villages ?

13. Pensez-vous que vos activités ont

- a. amélioré le taux de scolarisation de tous les enfants
- b. Comment ?
- c. amélioré la scolarisation des filles
- d. Comment
- e. amélioré le maintien des filles à l'école
- f. Comment
- g. contribué à la réussite des filles à l'école (réduction du taux de redoublement, meilleur réussite au CEP...)
- h. amélioré la scolarisation des garçons.

14. Quelles autres activités avez-vous organisées en ce qui concerne les filles à l'école ?

15. Parmi toutes les activités que vous avez engagées, quelles sont les deux dont vous êtes les plus fières ?

16. Parmi toutes les activités que vous avez engagées, quelles sont les deux qui n'ont pas marché ?

17. L'AME s'est-elle engagée dans la lutte contre le VIH/SIDA ?

- a. En faisant quoi ?

18. Le projet (est terminé) se termine bientôt. Que faites-vous maintenant sans le projet ?

19. Comment allez-vous vous organiser pour continuer vos activités ?

- a. Pour réunir des fonds ?
- b. Pour influencer les autorités ?
- c. Pour soutenir les élèves
- d. Pour favoriser la scolarité des filles
- e. Pour maintenir les filles à l'école
- f. Pour qu'elles réussissent à l'école
- g. Pour lutter contre le VIH/SIDA
- h. Quoi d'autre ?

20. Avez-vous eu l'occasion d'écouter des émissions de radio dans le cadre du projet CAEF ?

21. Quand ont lieu ces émissions ?

22. Pouvez-vous expliquer thèmes de ces émissions
23. Que vous ont apporté ces émissions ?
24. Si oui, quelles sont vos appréciations et suggestions ?
25. Vous sentez-vous capables d'intervenir auprès des autorités pour qu'ils règlent certains problèmes de l'école ?
26. Si une très petite aide était disponible, que feriez-vous avec ?

EVALUATION DU PROJET PROJET COMMUNAUTES EN ACTION POUR L'EDUCATION DES FILLES (CAEF)

BUREAU APE

Version 2

1. Pouvez-vous nous présenter votre bureau : (indiquer le sexe des membres)

1. Président
2. Vice-Président
3. Secrétaire
4. Trésorier
- 5.

2. Membres du Bureau Présents :

3. Qu'a fait l'APE au cours des deux dernières années?

- a. Scolarisation des élèves ? Comment
- b. Scolarisation des filles. Comment.
- c. Maintien des filles à l'école. Exemples ?
- d. Réussite des filles à l'école ? Exemple ?

Parmi ces activités, lesquelles ont été réalisées en collaboration avec l'AME ?

4. Combien de membres du bureau sont aussi membres de l'AME ?

5. Contribution de l'AME aux activités de l'APE ?

6. Parmi les décisions prises par l'APE, pouvez-vous citer celles qui ont été prises à la demande de l'AME ?

7. Quelle est votre appréciation de l'appui que vous a apporté l'ONG (indiquer le nom spécifique dans chaque commune)?

8. Nous aimerions savoir si l'APE ou l'AME ont participé aux activités suivantes :

- | | | |
|--|-----|-----|
| 1. Le comptage des enfants dans chaque classe (statistiques) | oui | non |
| 2. Distribution des livres | oui | non |
| 3. Plan de développement de l'école. | oui | non |
| 4. Recrutement d'enseignants communautaires | oui | non |
| 5. Construction de classes | oui | non |

Autres activités ?

Lesquelles ?

4. Pourriez-vous nous donner 2 exemples de soutien apporté par l'APE au directeur ?

5. Pourriez-vous nous donner 2 exemples de soutien aux enseignants ?

6. Que faites-vous avec votre CAPE ?

7. Avez-vous l'occasion de travailler avec le CCS ?

Exemples de collaboration.

8. Pouvez-vous nous résumer les constats de la plus récente Evaluation Rapide Organisationnelle ?

9. Aujourd'hui, sentez-vous une amélioration par rapport aux évaluations précédentes ?

10. Comment vous organisez-vous pour transférer les compétences que vous avez acquises à d'autres parents pour assurer la relève ?

11. Quand ont eu lieu la plus récente élection du bureau APE ?

12. Avez-vous eu l'occasion d'écouter ou de participer aux émissions radio diffusées dans le cadre du projet?

13. Quand ont lieu ces émissions ?

14. Pouvez-vous expliquer plusieurs thèmes de ces émissions ?

15. Que vous apportent ces émissions ?

16. Le projet va bientôt se terminer. Qu'a contribué le projet à votre communauté ?

17. Les activités qu'a organisée le projet pourront-elles avoir lieu une fois le projet terminé ?

EVALUATION DU PROJET PROJET COMMUNAUTES EN ACTION POUR L'EDUCATION DES FILLES (CAEF)

CAPE

Version préliminaire 2

1. Membres présents:

2. APE Fonction APE Fonction CAPE

3. Pouvez-vous décrire le rôle joué par l'ONG (World Education) dans votre formation et dans vos activités actuelles ?

4. Pouvez-vous décrire le rôle joué par la coordination ?

5. Avez-vous observé une contribution des AME aux activités des APE ?

6. Lesquelles ?

7. Selon vous, quelles est la contribution des AME aux activités de la CAPE ?

8. Croyez-vous que la participation des filles et la réussite des filles à l'école sont mieux compris maintenant ?

9. Votre CAPE a-t-elle organisé des activités concernant le VIH/SIDA ?

10. Pensez-vous qu'il existe des APE qui aimeraient créer des AME dans votre commune ?

11. Comment entrevoyez-vous le rôle des coordinations à l'avenir ?

12. Voyez-vous la nécessité d'une organisation représentant les parents au niveau départemental ?

13. Voyez-vous la nécessité d'une organisation représentant les parents d'élèves au niveau national ?

14. Avez-vous eu l'occasion d'écouter des émissions de radio dans le cadre du projet CAEF ?

15. Quand ont lieu ces émissions ?

16. Pouvez-vous expliquer thèmes de ces émissions

17. Que vous ont apporté ces émissions ?

18. Si oui, quelles sont vos appréciations et suggestions ?

EVALUATION DU PROJET PROJET COMMUNAUTES EN ACTION POUR L'EDUCATION DES FILLES (CAEF)

GUIDE D'ENTRETIEN CCS

VERSION 3

1. Combien votre CS compte-t-elle d'écoles primaires ?
2. Quelle relation votre CS entretient-elle avec WEB ? Depuis quand ?
3. Avez-vous eu l'occasion de participer à la mise en œuvre du Projet CAEF et en particulier à la mise en place des AME dans des écoles de votre CS ?
4. Combien votre CS compte-t-elle d'écoles dotées d'AME ?
5. Quelles sont les activités menées par ces AME
 - (amélioration de l'accès,
 - amélioration de la rétention ou du taux de fréquentation scolaire,
 - Réussite scolaire de tous, en particulier des filles ?
 - cantines scolaires,
 - lutte contre le VIH/SIDA, etc.) dans les écoles de votre circonscription scolaire ?
6. Comment appréciez-vous les activités des AME dans les écoles, et de manière plus générale leur contribution au développement des écoles comparée à celle apportée jusque-là par les APE ?
 - Cette contribution vous paraît-elle efficace ?
 - Quelles sont selon vous les forces et faiblesses de cette expérience ?
7. Quels sont les changements notables que vous avez observés dans les écoles ciblées par le Projet CAEF depuis la mise en place des AME eu égard à la situation qui prévalait jusque-là dans ces écoles ?
8. Quel appui votre CS apporte-t-elle aux AME dans la réalisation de leurs activités et des objectifs poursuivis par leurs associations ?
9. Souhaitez-vous voir l'expérience se poursuivre et s'étendre aux autres écoles de votre CS ? Ou auriez-vous préféré que l'on n'y mette fin et pourquoi ?

10. Quelles suggestions pouvez-vous faire pour améliorer cette expérience eu égard aux insuffisances éventuellement constatées sur le terrain ?
11. Connaissez-vous d'autres intervenants (ONG, Projet,...) qui travaillent avec les APE ou les AME ?
Si oui, que font-ils ?
12. Quelle appréciation faites-vous de leurs interventions en terme de forces et de faiblesses ?
13. Avez-vous eu l'occasion d'écouter des émissions de radio dans le cadre du projet CAEF ?
14. Quand ont lieu ces émissions ?
15. Pouvez-vous expliquer thèmes de ces émissions
16. Que vous ont apporté ces émissions ?
17. Si oui, quelles sont vos appréciations et suggestions ?
18. Quelles sont selon vous les chances de pérennisation des actions menées dans le cadre du projet CAEF maintenant qu'il arrive à sa fin.
Pourquoi ?
19. Avez-vous d'autres choses à déclarer ?

EVALUATION DU PROJET PROJET COMMUNAUTES EN ACTION POUR L'EDUCATION DES FILLES (CAEF)

GUIDE D'ENTRETIEN DIRECTEURS

Version 3

1. Depuis quand êtes-vous directeur de cette école ?
2. Depuis quand existe-t-il dans votre école une AME ?
3. Que fait l'AME pour l'école dans les domaines suivants :
 - a. amélioration de l'accès,
 - b. amélioration de la rétention ou du taux de fréquentation scolaire,
 - c. Réussite de tous les élèves, surtout des filles ?
 - d. lutte contre le VIH/SIDA, etc.) ?
4. Quelle relation existe-t-il entre l'AME et l'APE de votre école ?
5. Quelles sont les activités réalisées ou les services rendus par l'AME à votre école dans ces différents domaines ? Pouvez-vous citer quelques exemples concrets ?
6. Ces activités ont-elles été réalisées de façon autonome ou en collaboration avec l'APE de votre école ?
7. Quels sont les changements significatifs que vous avez observés depuis la mise en place de l'AME de votre école ? Dans quels domaines en particulier ?
8. Pensez-vous qu'une APE ou une AME est essentielle dans la bonne gestion d'une école
9. Quel appui, en votre qualité de directeur, avez-vous apporté à la mise en place et au fonctionnement de l'AME depuis sa création ?
10. Combien de réunions avez-vous tenues avec l'AME depuis le début de l'année scolaire ?
11. De quoi avez-vous parlé ?
12. L'AME participe-t-elle aux assemblées générales de l'APE en tant qu'entité ou les membres de l'AME participent à ces réunions plutôt à titre individuel ?
13. L'AME contribue-t-elle à la résolution des problèmes de l'école ? Cette contribution est-elle efficace ?

14. Souhaitez-vous voir se poursuivre et se développer davantage cette expérience de collaboration entre l'AME et votre école ? Ou auriez-vous préféré plutôt vous contenter d'une collaboration avec l'APE comme par le passé et pourquoi ?
15. Existe-t-il des conflits entre
 - a. l'APE et vous ou Source du conflit :
 - b. entre l'AME et vous, ou encore Source du conflit :
 - c. entre l'APE et l'AME ? Source du conflit :
16. Existe-t-il des conflits
 - a. entre l'APE et les enseignants ?
 - b. entre l'AME et les enseignants ?
 - c. Sur quoi portaient ces conflits ?
17. Ces conflits ont-ils été résolus ? De quelle manière ?
18. Maintenant que le projet est terminé, quelles sont les activités de l'AME ?
19. Le bureau APE entretient-il des liens avec la CAPE ?
20. Avez-vous eu l'occasion d'écouter des émissions de radio dans le cadre du projet CAEF ?
21. Quand ont lieu ces émissions ?
22. Pouvez-vous expliquer thèmes de ces émissions
23. Que vous ont apporté ces émissions ?
24. Quelles sont, selon vous, les chances de pérennisation des actions menées dans le cadre du projet CAEF maintenant qu'il arrive à sa fin (est terminé) ?
25. Quelles sont les activités que l'AME pourrait mener sans aide extérieure ?
26. Avez-vous d'autres choses à déclarer ?

EVALUATION DU PROJET PROJET COMMUNAUTES EN ACTION POUR L'EDUCATION DES FILLES (CAEF)

ENTRETIEN MAIRIE

Version 2

- 1) Quel est la situation actuelle de l'éducation dans la commune en ce qui concerne :
 - L'accès à l'école Comment le savez-vous ?
 - Le maintien des enfants à l'école Comment le savez-vous ?
 - L'apprentissage des enfants à l'école Comment le savez-vous ?
 - L'équité genre Comment le savez-vous ?
 - La manière dont les acteurs suivants déchargent leur tâche
 1. CCS,
 2. CAPE,
 3. Enseignants
 4. Directeurs,
 5. animateurs de l'ONG
 6. APE et AME
 7. Que pensez-vous du travail réalisé par les AME ?
 8. Y-a-t-il au niveau de l'administration communale une personne chargée du suivi de l'exécution des activités scolaires ?

- 2) Quelle est la place de l'éducation dans le PDC ? si la commune en a un

- 3) Qui sont ceux qui ont participé à l'élaboration du plan d'action sectoriel dans le domaine de l'éducation ?
 - Les APE et/ou la CAPE : propositions ?
 - Dans quelles mesures les APE et/ou la CAPE participent à la mise en œuvre du plan sectoriel ?
 - Qui sont les principaux partenaires de la mairie en matière d'éducation ?
 - Que font-ils ?
 - Quels sont les actions concrètes que la mairie a menées pour accroître la participation des parents (hommes et femmes) à la gestion du système scolaire ?

- 4) Quelle était la situation de l'éducation dans la commune il y a plus de deux ans ? Préciser ce qui a fondamentalement changé (positivement ou négativement) et justifiez votre réponse.

- 5) Que savez-vous de World Education et de ses activités dans la commune ?

- 6) Quelles appréciations faites-vous de ses activités avec les parents d'élèves (APE et AME) ?
Connaissez vous des réussites et des échecs ?
- 7) Si vous connaissez les AME, quelles appréciations faites-vous de ces association ?
- 8) Pensez-vous que les AME pourront travailler à côté des APE et en l'absence de l'appui extérieur fourni actuellement par WE et ses partenaires ?
- 9) Quelles sont les dispositions prises (les stratégies envisagées) par la mairie pour mettre en application la loi sur la décentralisation dans le secteur de l'éducation ?
- 10) Sur quelles structures de la société civile pensez-vous vous appuyer pour mettre en œuvre ces stratégies ?
- 11) Quelles sont vos attentes, suggestions et / ou recommandations pour une éducation de qualité (au niveau de la commune) qui responsabilise davantage les parents, désormais appelés à jouer un rôle plus important ?
- 12) Avez-vous eu l'occasion d'écouter ou de participer aux émissions radio dans le cadre du projet CAEF ?
- 13) Avez-vous observé des changements dans les attitudes des parents, et des jeunes, en ce qui concerne le VIH/SIDA ?
- 14) Avez-vous observé des changements de **comportement** en ce qui concerne le VIH/SIDA ?
- 15) Avez-vous écouté des émissions radio réalisées par vos APE ou AME ?
- 16) Quels sont les thèmes qui ont le plus retenu votre attention ?
17. Quelles sont selon vous les chances de pérennisation des actions menées dans le cadre du projet CAEF maintenant qu'il arrive à sa fin.

Pourquoi ?

18. Comment pensez-vous les pérenniser ?

EVALUATION DU PROJET PROJET COMMUNAUTES EN ACTION POUR L'EDUCATION DES FILLES (CAEF)

ENTRETIEN ONG

VERSION 3

17) Bref historique du partenariat avec WE, avec un accent particulier sur le projet CAEF

18) Stratégies mises en œuvre ?

- i) Les différents acteurs concernés et leurs rôles respectifs
- ii) Les principales étapes
- iii) Résultats prévus et obtenus / Programmes et rapports d'activités (suivi quantitatif)
- iv) Difficultés rencontrées et solutions adoptées ou préconisées
- v) Appuis spécifiques apportés par WE et appréciations de ces appuis

19) Quelles sont les réalisations des AME les plus importantes?

20) Quel a été le plus gros échec?

21) Est-ce que les femmes sont davantage impliquées dans la gestion du système scolaire a changé depuis l'avènement des AME ? Citez des cas précis.

22) Est-ce qu'il y a eu des conflits

- o entre APE et AME ? Donnez des exemples
- o entre APE et Directeurs ? Donnez des exemples

- entre l'APE et les enseignants ? Donnez des exemples

23) Quelles approches ont été mises en œuvre par le projet en ce qui concerne ?

- La scolarisation des filles ?
- Le maintien des filles ?
- La réussite des filles ?
- Lutte VIH/SIDA

24) Quelles approches ont été les plus efficaces ?

25) Si le projet devait être initié à nouveau, quelles seraient les changements à y apporter ?

- Les activités ou stratégies à éliminer ?
- Les activités ou stratégies à ajouter ?

26) Est-ce qu'il y a eu des communautés autres que celles couvertes par le projet qui ont souhaité avoir une AME ? Donner des exemples.

27) Le projet a-t-il eu des résultats inattendus ? Lesquels ? Comment justifier ces résultats ?

28) Qu'est-ce qui est prévu pour assurer la pérennisation des acquis du projet ? Que font les AME maintenant que le projet est terminé ?

29) Avez-vous eu l'occasion d'écouter ou de participer aux émissions radio-diffusées animées dans le cadre du projet CAEF ? Si oui, quelles sont vos appréciations et suggestions ?

30) La lutte contre le VIH/SIDA constitue un aspect du projet. Quels changements de comportement avez-vous observé depuis votre arrivée dans la communauté ?

31) Quel rôle a joué votre activité dans ce projet dans le développement de votre ONG ?

- Que font vos animateurs ?
- Votre ONG est-elle engagée dans de nouveaux projets ?
- Avez-vous d'autres choses à déclarer ?

