



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Education in Focus

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News and Updates from the USAID, Africa Bureau, Office of Sustainable Development, Education Division

Kidjo celebrates girls' education in Africa Internationally-known singer founds Batonga

“If you don’t educate, you cannot change the world,” said internationally-known West African singer, songwriter and UNICEF International Goodwill Ambassador Angelique Kidjo. On May 17, Kidjo participated at an event celebrating girls’ education hosted by Dr. Sarah Moten of USAID’s Africa Bureau.

Kidjo founded the Batonga Foundation, a non-governmental organization (NGO), to support educational development in Africa. Batonga is partnering with the Ambassadors Girls’ Scholarship Program (AGSP) partner, World Education, to provide secondary school scholarships to girls in Benin and Mali who completed primary school through AGSP scholarships. At a time when education for girls was not socially acceptable in her native country of Benin, Kidjo invented the word “Batonga” as a response to taunts when she was going to school. The boys did not know what the word meant, but to her it was an assertion of the rights of girls to education.

During the celebration, Abdoulaye Diop, Mali Ambassador to the United States, expressed gratitude to the Benin-born singer for extending “south-to-south” support to his country. “We are pleased with the interest in educating

girls; moreover we are proud to see we have partnerships between Africans to help Africa,” said Ambassador Diop.

Batonga became aware of the AGSP and World Education while exploring potential partners with which to work in Africa. They learned of World Education’s work with AGSP, which provides comprehensive support for girls’ education in the form of school scholarships, mentoring, and parent and community awareness programs to promote and support girls’ education. After several meetings, the two organizations came together to support and administer the Batonga Girl Scholarships in Benin and Mali.

Under the new partnership, Batonga girl scholarships will be awarded to 229 girls in Benin and 75 in Mali who have been part of the AGSP and are about to graduate from primary school. In both cases, the AGSP was administered by World Education. The Batonga Girl Scholarships will be administered by World Education on behalf of Batonga.

Kidjo, a four-time Grammy Award nominee, embraces the education of girls and knows firsthand that when a woman is educated, it changes not only her life but those of

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First grade students in Betioky, Madagascar using twigs to explore number concepts during an interactive radio program. See page 9 for full story.

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Reflections

The first quarter of 2007 has been filled with activity and accomplishments for our division. We kicked off the year preparing for an incredible workshop with the Textbooks and Learning Materials Program (TLMP).

For three days we worked from sun up to sun down and beyond to share critical information and problem solve some of the challenges of cross-cultural and the cross-continental creating, publishing and distributing of text books for African children. It was inspiring to see the work being done in the field to ensure quality and excellence from all involved in the process.

In March, I had the pleasure of speaking at a symposium hosted by the Society for International Development (SID) in honor of International Women's Day.

During the same month, I was delighted to receive an invitation to celebrate the 95th birthday of renowned Civil Rights leader, Dr. Dorothy Height, President Emeritas of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW). These two events brought to mind a recent visit one of my staff made to a SAFE (Student Alliance for Female Education) Club meeting in Zambia. What these events

have in common is, despite the focus on women and girls, there were men in numbers too large to ignore---present, engaged and committed to gender issues.

While the Africa Education Initiative (AEI) has had an emphasis on girls, we have always included men and boys in such efforts as teacher training, textbook and learning materials program, and even the integrated HIV/AIDS awareness outreach and parent and community strengthening activities. I am pleased to respond to the question that is often asked of me regarding the Ambassador Girls' Scholarship Program, "What about the boys?" As we enter this next phase of the Initiative, we will be picking up disadvantaged, marginalized and vulnerable boys.

Finally, April was filled with special events and activities. Most notable for the education team was the official launch of the AEI Video by First Lady Laura Bush during Education for All Week. Nearly 200 guests supported the event, including members of the African Diplomatic Corps, representatives from other government agencies, members of the greater African development community, implementing partners and beneficiaries.



Dr. Sarah Moten

Since the launch, we have been inundated with many e-mails, calls and notes acknowledging our efforts to improve lives today, so that lives tomorrow can be saved.

On behalf of the education team, I thank all of you ---mission colleagues, implementers and host country partners for playing such an integral role in ensuring that these efforts bear fruit.

This issue of the newsletter reflects the incredible work being done on the ground by our team. From delivering textbooks to presenting Pygmy children with birth certificates to making education more accessible in Benin--the work is getting done, changes are being made and lives are being transformed.

Bridging education gap



Representatives from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and in-country partner International Partnership for Human Development, had the honor of visiting a Pygmy village and presenting the village school children with their birth certificates. This activity brings the Pygmies one step closer to bridging the gap between a marginalized population in the country and advancing their access to education. USDA and USAID programs have increased school attendance of Pygmy children and worked to incorporate Pygmy parents into school garden community meetings and trainings.

Laura Bush launches AEI documentary

Mrs. Laura Bush officially launched an Africa Education Initiative documentary April 24 during the “Education for All” week at the Academy for Educational Development. Mrs. Bush, an outspoken advocate for education in Africa and major supporter of AEI, spoke about the successes of the initiative to date, noting that more than 250,000 scholarships have been awarded; nearly four million textbooks distributed; and more than 600,000 teachers trained.

“Education has the power to transform individual lives, and the power to transform communities and whole societies,” said Mrs. Bush.

She also spoke about the perseverance of three scholarship recipients, who were in the audience. Eunice, Evelyn and Agnes are Maasai young women from the rural grasslands of Kenya.

“In their community, education for girls is rare. Most girls stay at home to help with the chores, and many are betrothed and married by the age of 10,” said Mrs. Bush.

Eunice, was unique among her 15 siblings. She’s the only one who received an education. Agnes’ family had a hard time paying her school fees, and they were almost forced to give her away in early marriage. Evelyn was the only girl from her village to ever complete high school.

“Today, these three young women are educational pioneers,” said Mrs. Bush. “With help from AEI’s Ambassadors Girls’ Scholarship Program, they’ve completed high school with outstanding academic records.”

Agnes, Evelyn and Eunice have been recognized for their accomplishments with full undergraduate scholarships. Now they’re pursuing college degrees at Chicago State University.

The “big three,” as these students are called in their villages, are the first women in their communities to go to college.

“They understand that their education begins a new chap-

ter in their lives, but also in the lives of their people,” said Mrs. Bush.

“I am the new face of the Maasai girl,” said Evelyn. “And I’ll be a source of hope in my community.”

The vision for the documentary was to capture the stories of girls like Evelyn in order to articulate the work AEI does, and show how the program changes lives.

“We viewed the documentary as an opportunity to humanize our work,” said Aleta Williams, AEI Documentary Executive Producer, USAID. “It also provided a much-needed platform for our partners and beneficiaries to help ‘tell the story.’”

AEI, in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Office of Communications, launched

into a creative process to demonstrate how the work in Africa is changing lives. The documentary took the team on a journey to Zambia, Kenya, Senegal, North Carolina, Chicago and then back to Washington, D.C.

Countless interviews with beneficiaries, mentors, teachers, scholarship recipients, ministry officials, implementing partners, and members of the U.S. and African Diplomatic Corps, yielded more than 20 hours of video footage and a substantial collection of photographs.

“Throughout these personal encounters, we were constantly amazed, inspired and humbled by the stories told of lives made better through AEI

interventions,” said Williams.

David Black, producer and director at USDA, said he was fortunate to encounter Christopher Williams, a young musician, whose music helped him envision how to weave the stories. The 30-minute documentary also includes six short success stories and an introduction by Mrs. Bush.

“As we often say on the education team, ‘at the heart of what we do, is the African child,’” said Aleta Williams.

For copies of the documentary or more information about this story, contact Aleta Williams at alwilliams@usaid.gov. The documentary will be available soon at the USAID Web site: www.usaid.gov



Sheelah Craighead, White House

Mrs. Laura Bush with three Maasai Ambassador Girls' Scholarship Program recipients. Mrs. Laura Bush delivered remarks at the launch of the President's Africa Education Initiative video at the Academy for Educational Development April 24 in Washington, D.C.

USAID provides cultural textbooks to Ethiopia

Students engage with content, learn interactively



Dr. Mary W. Spor, Program Director TLMP; Berhanu Habtemariam, Director, Institute for Curriculum Development and Research, Ethiopia, look over the newly printed Teacher's guide for English for Ethiopia, Grade 7, with a representative of the Etio Tikur Abai Industrial and Commercial Plc. Printing House in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

In some areas of Ethiopia, a classroom of up to 100 students shares one textbook. But now there is at least one English language book for every two students grades 6 and 7, thanks to the efforts of USAID, Alabama A&M University, and the Ethiopian Ministry of Education.

"Through the Textbooks, Learning and Materials Program (TLMP) the number of research-based culturally appropriate textbooks and learning materials has increased exponentially in Sub-Saharan African countries," said Dr. Mary Spor, program director, of the Ethiopia partnership.

Alabama A&M University accepted the challenge of developing two English textbooks, two teachers guides, and evaluating mathematics and science curricula from October 2006 through September 2007.

"These textbooks are making a positive impact on teaching and learning," said Dr. Spor. "Students are now more engaged with the content, which reflects the entire country and its culture."

Additionally, students learn interactively, and express themselves more frequently both verbally and

in writing, she said. It is also helping to build capacity in Ethiopia for the textbook development process that is based on the Ethiopian National Curricula of the Ministry of Education.

Publishing the textbooks has had a positive economic impact. The manager at the printing house noted that prior to beginning publication of these textbooks and teacher's guides, he employed about 25 people. During the printing process, the number increased to more than 125.

"Hard work through collaboration and dedication to making life better for Ethiopians must begin in the classroom and translate to the home and community," said Dr. Spor. "A better educated populace can make that happen."

Through USAID's TLMP program, this is becoming a reality in Ethiopia. During the 2006-2007 school year, 30,000 teachers and 780,000 students will have new English books and teachers guides in grades 6 and 7.

For more information contact Dr. Mary Spor, Program Director, Ethiopian partnership, AAMU TLMP Program at mary.spor@email.aamu.edu

"Education is the FOUNDATION of development and democracy---in every culture, on every continent. And we'll work to give Africa's children the advantages of LITERACY and LEARNING so they can build Africa's future."

President George W. Bush

Kidjo

From page 1

her children and family.

"Educating girls in Africa gives them the strength and the tools they need to be the mothers of change," said Kidjo. "My mother was educated and she fought for me to go to school, despite pressure from many in our extended family who argued that only boys should be educated."

"Once an African woman is educated, she fights to ensure both sons and daughters receive an education.

From this is born a tradition that is passed on and grows from family to family, from generation to generation—a tradition that is going to change the future for Africa," she said.

For more information about the Batonga Foundation please visit www.batongafoundation.org. For more information about this story, contact Sharon Mangin Nwankwo at snwankwo@usaid.gov



Angelique Kidjo with Dr. Sarah Moten, USAID Africa Bureau, during an event to celebrate girls' education in Africa

Workshop forges relationships, builds foundation for future success

“What we invest in today will have lasting impact for the countries we’re serving tomorrow,” said Dr. Vivian Taylor, Project Director, Mississippi Consortium for International Development, after the third twelve-hour day. “I’m not tired. This has been an excellent and worthwhile time.”

Dr. Taylor refers to the Textbooks and Learning Materials Program (TLMP) conference held February 4-7, where more than 49 partners, evaluators and USAID staff shared lessons learned and discussed best practices of the program.

The group focused on how to collaborate, address cultural challenges and forge international business relationships in order to develop, produce and distribute textbooks and educational learning materials to sub-Saharan Africa.

“Africa’s education challenges are formidable,” said Dr. Sarah Moten, Chief, Education Division, Office of Sustainable Development. “Primary school enrollments and literacy rates in Africa are among the lowest in the world and in many countries books and other learning tools do not exist. If books are available they are shared by several students.”

“The work these institutions are doing is groundbreaking,” said Freeman Daniels, the workshop’s coordinator and Education Officer of the Education Division at USAID. “We are forging relationships where none existed before and delivering textbooks

to some countries that didn’t believe in the possibilities of education. The conference allowed us the ability to discuss fully how to advance our work further, look at processes that are working and how we can achieve even more.”

With the assistance of six minority serving institutions and their TLMP implementing partners, more than 4 million textbooks and other learning

“We wanted our team and our partners to come to the workshop with ideas and critical thinking so that we can create a system that will last. We’ve accomplished much. To look into the eyes of a young boy or girl who has a book of their own is wonderful and I’m very proud of what we’ve been able to do.”

-Dr. Sarah Moten
USAID

materials have been provided to 28 countries in Africa.

In Senegal, the partnership with Elizabeth City State University has forged a relationship with a Senegalese printer to manufacture books for primary and secondary students.

“The relationship with our partners is not just a relationship of assistance,” said Leopold Faye, Minister of Education, Senegal.

“Children are allowed to have textbooks that are written in French. For years students shared books—today we have one textbook for each student,” he said.

Participants learned about the challenges and accomplishments faced in each country. Tanzania will provide

biology, chemistry and physics textbooks to high school level students. Ghana printed and distributed more than 516,000 Kindergarten to 3rd grade textbooks and teaching guides and 90,700 wall charts for classrooms.

From the importance of language, to the necessity of redirecting dollars and the commitment of African ministries of education, conference

participants were treated to a full menu of topics and problem solving exercises to strengthen and improve textbook delivery systems and distribution in Africa. Attendees discussed protocol and procedures, public diplomacy, cultural differences and visa requirements.

Sessions also included the importance of textbooks reflecting the culture, project management and how to

engage the private sector. Everyone worked from sun up to sun down and beyond.

“We wanted our team and our partners to come to the workshop with ideas and critical thinking so that we can create a system that will last,” said Dr. Sarah Moten. “We’ve accomplished much. To look into the eyes of a young boy or girl who has a book of their own is wonderful and I’m very proud of what we’ve been able to do.”

The team will continue to build on lessons learned, diversify resources, problem solve and find opportunities to be relevant and visionary. “The process is just as important as the products,” said Dr. Moten.



Silhouettes of determination

Congo school gardens take the classroom outside

Silence abruptly cut through the conversation of the excited U.S. Department of Agriculture team as their bouncing vehicle slowed down along a dimly lit road in Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo. Dusk was approaching, and all the team could see were silhouettes of Congolese youth reflected in the dim streetlights holding objects in their hands. At closer glance and with encouragement from the driver, we could finally identify what these silhouettes were holding – school books.

THE GARDEN

This scene is just one small example of perseverance, dedication and desire to learn among Africa's school children. They are aware that education is vital to unlocking future opportunities. To support President Bush's Africa Education Initiative (AEI), a USDA School Garden training team traveled to the Republic of Congo in January to conduct teachers' in-service training.

The USDA School Gardens pilot program, initiated in 2005, cuts across many components of AEI for outreach to marginalized populations, teacher training programs, educational support scholarships and textbook donations. The program was originally implemented to teach students, teachers and parents how to use gardens as a learning laboratory where the whole community is involved. The program serves primary school children in Congo, with a special focus on integrating Pygmy children, into activities and the community.

A sister school gardens program focusing on secondary schools is in development for the Republic of Rwanda. Its emphasis is on a more advanced agricultural science curriculum.

FOLLOW UP

The team also traveled to the rural village of Sibiti, located in the Lekoumou District, as follow-up for training held in December 2005. The second training sessions, held this January, focused on strengthening teachers' confidence and proficiency in using gardens as learning laboratories and integrating them into the standardized Republic of Congo curriculum. Training and field observations addressed management and technical production concerns with teachers and community members.

Two people from each of the 27 participating schools were invited to the training, along with Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Education officials who supervise teachers and school directors. To build additional support as well as continuity with the schools, about half of the participants had attended the training in 2005 while the rest were newcomers.

Dr. Michael Doyle of Bay Mills Community Tribal College in Michigan, addressed technical agriculture issues and successes. Dr. Mary Crave of the University of Wisconsin-Extension focused on curriculum and community concerns.

Training took place over three days. The first two days focused on the "Teacher's Guide to School Gardens Manual," and other resources developed by the USDA training team. Participants also discovered the value of experiential learning, challenges in engaging the community in school gardens, designing lessons in science, math, French, social studies and other disciplines to integrate the garden. A third day of training focused on technical issues in the garden, especially composting and natural pesticides and fungicides.

On the fourth day teachers and other participants hosted

an open house at the demonstration garden to apply skills learned during the training.

OPEN HOUSE

The open house reached out to more than 150 community members through garden tours and teacher demonstrations at Henri Bounda School and training site. Before and after the training, team members and their in-country partner, International Partnership for Human Development (IPHD), assessed school gardens.

USDA experts answered technical and management questions specific to each of the 27 school gardens in the pilot project, targeting more than 80 teachers and 9,500 students in the area.

THE RESULT

The Republic of Congo pilot school gardens program has been a great success thanks in part to a strong partnership between the government of the Republic of the Congo, USDA and IPHD. IPHD staff offer local technical agricultural expertise, distribute gardening tools and seeds and manage the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program in Republic of Congo for USDA.

Food for Education supports child development, education and food security for some of the poorest children throughout the world with the primary goal being food as an incentive to improve education and nutrition. As a result, food assistance supporting school lunches has increased school attendance, especially for girls.

Teachers said the training will help them sustain a school garden and enable them to be better teachers using the garden as a laboratory. The gardens and school feeding program have provided food for the students, for many of which this is their only meal of the day.

The garden has also generated revenue for some schools that chose to sell some of the excess food in order to purchase much needed tools and seeds, dig wells, and also help subsidize school fees so that all children may attend school regardless of economic status.

Teachers reported the program has enabled students to apply agricultural

theory at school and at home through food production. “Teachers have little more than a piece of chalk and blackboard as teaching tools. They’ve jumped at the chance to have the garden as a laboratory, Dr. Crave said. “I’ve been very impressed by their commitment and enthusiasm.” The program has also increased parent and community involvement and interest in supporting the school garden. The overall program concept has had wide applications throughout Congo and perhaps potential for all other African nations.

REACHING OUT

Africa is constantly in the public eye for the tragedies of AIDS, hunger, civil wars and famine. It seems so far away and removed from Americans’ daily lives. Dr. Crave traveled to Congo for the first time in June 2005. Upon return from her first trip, she reached out to share her experience with her community.

“I was touched by the generosity and interest of friends and a local garden club when they offered money to help buy much needed seeds for the school gardens. They could tell their donations were really going to make a difference for students,” says Crave. “Many have asked for an update on the project since the second trip.” Presentations like this are just one way people have learned more about AEI and how it has touched lives.

After shaking the hands of those young “silhouettes” who were reaching out, and hearing such powerful singing voices coming from small children, the USDA team knew that their lives had been changed forever. USDA and USAID, working through AEI, go far beyond just sending food aid. They go a step further to build capacity and sustainability through agricultural education and student and community empowerment.

“We’ve been very fortunate to have all the elements necessary for a school garden program. This makes me confident that the program will be sustained and grow long after AEI is finished,” explained Dr. Crave.

For more information contact: Jennifer Maurer and Gabbriel Frigm with USDA/FAS’s Office of Capacity Building and Development at Jennifer.Maurer@usda.gov or Gabbriel.Frigm@usda.gov.



USDA/FAS School Garden Team

Education in focus

USAID's Support Fast Tracks Benin's Education System

"In the education sector, where we will contribute about 5.1 million dollars during the first year [of this program], our partnership aims to make quality education more accessible to a greater number of children, especially to girls," said H.E. Gayleatha B. Brown, United States Ambassador to the Republic of Benin. "With our assistance the Government of Benin is going to reinforce the successes achieved in the sector."

As one of the first donors to support Benin's primary education reform, USAID's holistic approach focuses on capacity building and institutional support, curriculum development, teacher training, community involvement in school management and girls' education. Through USAID assistance, the number of children attending school increased dramatically from 418,000 in 1990 to more than 1.3 million in 2005 with a remarkable increase of more than 400 percent-- (141,000 to 570,000) in the number of girls attending school.

Recently, USAID led a group of twelve international donors in providing technical support to the Ministry of Education in the development and approval of the Benin ten-year Education

Sector Development Plan (TESDP). The Plan will guide the development and improvement of Benin's education system, with a goal of achieving universal primary education by 2015.

USAID Benin submitted the donor assessment of the plan and letter of endorsement to the Education for All (EFA) Fast Track Initiative (FTI) secretariat, a partnership between developing and donor countries to help developing countries achieve universal primary education by 2015. Approval of these documents by the Secretariat in February 2007 qualified Benin to receive funds.

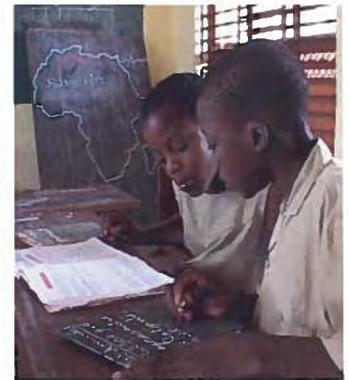
The FTI partnership is supported by a steering committee and a Secretariat managed by the World Bank. Created in 2002, the FTI increases education funding available to low-income countries that demonstrate a serious commitment to achieving universal primary education.

Donor endorsement of the TESDP and the inclusion of Benin in the Fast-Track Initiative are important achievements for

"Investing in girls is an undeniable element in the promotion of improved health and community development. With increased enrollment of girls we will have educated women that will play key roles in the development of the nation."

-Gayleatha B. Brown
U.S. Ambassador to Benin

See BENIN page 12



Hyppolyte Djoir

Interactive radio program provides creative education to Madagascar's elementary students

Madagascar's commitment to providing fundamental education to all elementary students is causing dramatic increases in the enrollment rates of Malagasy children. While this is a striking achievement towards improving the overall quality of life for the people of Madagascar, it has placed an even greater burden on the already strained Ministry of Education's teacher education program.

In Madagascar, 80 percent of the population lives in rural areas with limited or no access to public transportation and providing regular teacher training is difficult, if not impossible. To meet this challenge the Ministry of Education developed innovative interactive radio programs.

During a radio lesson, teachers are asked to follow an instructional model that accomplishes three purposes: students learn, teachers learn to teach better by receiving guided, hands-on practice about how to implement activity learning situations, and teachers come to see how good classroom practice leads to improved learning.

The teachers and children in the radio programs propose games, songs, stories and other hands-on activities teachers can do with their students to help them develop mandated educational competencies.

Interactive radio functions as a teacher training tool because it broadcasts directly into classrooms and is carefully structured to guide teachers in working interactively with their students.

The Ministry of Education writing team prepares the broadcasts structure and paces the content to align with

the national curriculum. The team determines exactly which stories, songs, and activities will be included in each program and provides instructions to teachers to help them understand how to implement those activities.

For example, in a lesson about math, the radio narrator might say "teacher, please ask each student to turn to the student next to him and form a pair; have each pair count all of the pens they have brought with them today."

Through this kind of exercise, teachers receive assistance in grouping students in different ways and in assigning them increasingly complicated tasks, which reduces "chalk and talk" time.

The radio narrator can also guide teachers to include groups that may have been marginalized, by saying "call on a child in the back row to answer this question," or "invite two girls to the blackboard to play this game."

The radio program also promotes parental involvement in children's learning. One of the characters presented in the radio program may talk briefly to parents and propose a simple game or activity they can do in the evening, at home, to reinforce what the children learned in school. Activities and games use only locally available, no cost materials and do not require that the parents be literate or have formal education.



Noardjim Santa Andrianihaje

Madagascar plans to develop more than 150 interactive radio programs for grades 1 and 2 children throughout the county. The programs will be broadcast three times a week for each grade level and will help students build key literacy and mathematical skills. Teachers also receive assistance in implementing the new vision of teaching and learning outlined in Madagascar's new competency-based curriculum.

With insufficient numbers of teachers being trained to meet parental demands, the government of Madagascar has encouraged local communities, where no trained teacher is available, to recruit those individuals with an interest in teaching.

While these 'community-based teachers' have received no formal teacher training, Madagascar's Ministry of Education is committed through the interactive radio programs, to ensuring teachers receive ongoing professional support and assistance in designing and implementing active, student-centered teaching practices.

For the Ministry of Education, helping teachers to adopt more effective and innovative learning strategies is key to encouraging students to stay in school. It is also addressing Madagascar's high dropout rate.

*For more information contact:
Norma Evans at evans@edc.org*

Mentoring program empowers mothers

An award-winning mentoring program is bringing Beninese mothers together to provide support to young girls and encourage parental and community involvement in the education process. The Mother's Associations in Primary Public Schools (Association des Mères d'Elèves-AME) are a major voice for women's participation in Benin's educational system. World Education through the USAID funded Civic Action in School Environment Project (CASE) started the program.

In January 2007, USAID/Benin submitted the AME as a breakthrough idea in education to the Academy for Educational Development's Breakthrough Ideas in Education Initiative. Out of more than 40 ideas received, the AME was identified as one of six winning ideas.

The program, which empowers women to participate in the education system, improve girls' access to education, and provides educational materials in the fight against HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. The program was introduced into 36 schools in Benin where minimum participation of women in education existed.

Now in many of these districts, women are more involved in their children's formal education. Significant decreases have occurred in child trafficking and student dropouts; in addition considerable increases in student enrollment, retention and academic achievement are visible, especially for girls.

The AME have taken girls out of

"We have to end this practice of vidomégon because it hinders the development of our children. Thanks to the AME, I have my daughter back and she's going to school."

-Kindjissi Houndjah.

child labor including domestic servitude, or away from market hawking (selling), and have returned them to their families and to school. In such cases, the AME provides modest financial or material assistance to the girls to facilitate enrollment in school.

AME members raise the funds internally through income generating activities to finance such support to needy families, and for school improvements, community teachers, and school lunches.

"We have to end this practice of vidomégon because it hinders the development of our children. Thanks to the AME, I have my daughter back and she's going to school." says Kindjissi Houndjah.

Kindjissi Houndjah is talking about the practice whereby poor, often rural, families place a child, primarily a daughter, in the home of a wealthier family generally in larger cities such as Cotonou and Porto Novo to work as servants.

Faced with financial difficulties, Kindjissi sent her daughter, Hainou Akouvi, to live with a cousin in town who promised to send Hainou to school. Kindjissi would now have one

less mouth to feed. Sadly, her cousin never sent Hainou to school.

When members of the local AME noticed that Hainou was no longer at home, they approached Kindjissi to find out what happened. They explained to her why it was important that all of her children have the opportunity to go to school. With the financial help and moral support of the AME, Kindjissi was able to bring Hainou home where she is now a primary school student.

Vidomégon, a major problem in southern Benin, is just one of the reasons for a gap between girls' and boys' enrollment in primary school. Other reasons include child trafficking, especially to neighboring countries, and early forced marriage.

The AME's sensitize families on the importance of educating all of their children. When mothers notice that a child is absent for an extended period, they mobilize to ensure the return of the child and his or her re-enrolment in school.

For more information contact: Cynthia Taha, Basic Education Team Leader, USAID, Benin at ctaha@usaid.gov

Educational television engages students

The MindSet Cabanga (Cabanga means “think” in Zulu) is a television channel aimed at supporting educators and reforming primary curriculum in South Africa. MindSet, a public-private partnership with Global Development Alliance, provides free education content via video, multimedia and print. In August 2004, USAID awarded MindSet Network, a South African non-governmental organization (NGO) support to create a primary school television channel targeting learners and educators in kindergarten through fifth grade with region-wide scalability.

Significant progress has occurred since the agreement was signed. Mindset conducted focus group research, advocacy and consultation and secured buy-in from the South African National and provincial Departments of Education, (DOE) including school management and parent groups.

The MindSet Cabanga content has been developed to address the needs of the South African curriculum with a particular focus on Mathematics, Natural Sciences and Technology. The content in each learning area is divided according to established learning outcomes defined in the South African Revised National Curriculum Statements. MindSet

Cabanga has an initial content focus on fourth grade.

“MindSet Cabanga takes learners and teachers to places they often cannot otherwise venture, said Ann Lamont, former CEO, Mindset Network. “Experiences and resources that would otherwise be unavailable to learners and educators will now be brought directly into the classroom via satellite and can be accessed at any time.”

The Channel’s video content is highly interactive and engaging. It makes use of age appropriate, highly stimulating, educational music and graphics and even comedy with thought-provoking elements.

The technical infrastructure to allow teachers to utilize Cabanga content “on-demand” reaches more than 50 South African schools. The infrastructure roll-out features two training programs for local administrators and educators and as a result more than 300 principals, department heads and teachers were trained. Recently, the MindSet Network team visited training institutes in Kenya to determine the feasibility of establishing sites there.

For more information contact: Joe Kitts, Education Development Officer, USAID, Office of Sustainable Development, Education Division at jkitts@usaid.gov



Joe Kitts

Kara Swedlow, Peace Corps Volunteer working with Mindset Limpopo Province target schools. Robert “Wick” Powers, USAID/South Africa Education Officer and Mokgoma Primary School Principal, Nebo School District, South Africa.

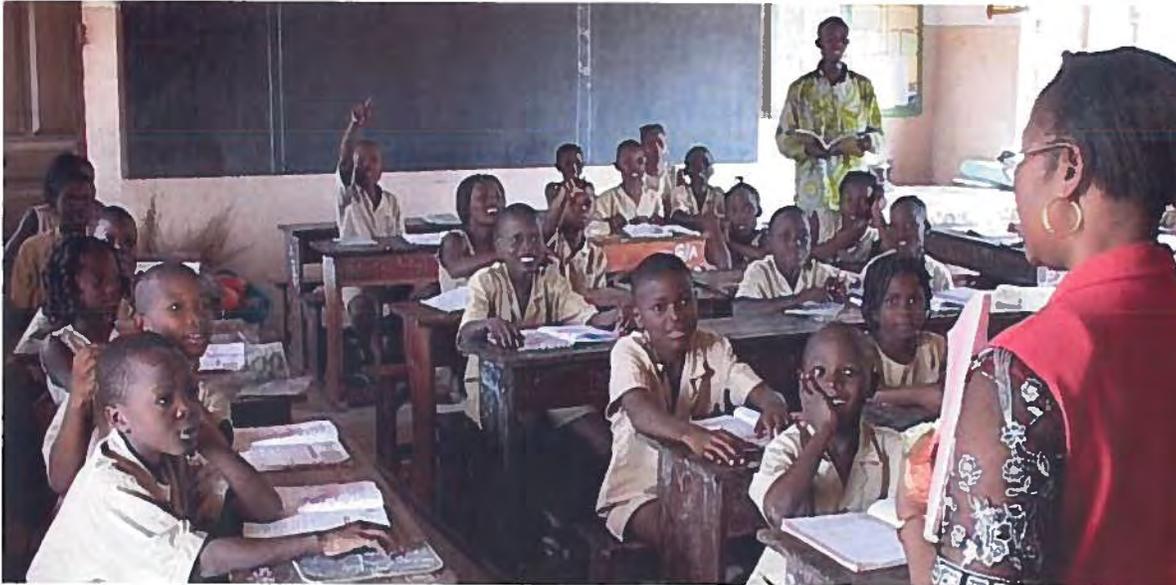


Joe Kitts

Kara Swedlow, Peace Corps Volunteer working with Mindset Limpopo Province target schools Sekhukune Primary School Principal, Sekhukune School District, South Africa.

Benin

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Hypolyte Djoï

the education sector. These are critical steps to obtain resources to address quality and access problems that have confronted Benin's education system since the beginning of primary education reform in 1991. By taking advantage of this initiative, Benin is pursuing a path toward sustainable development of the education sector and accelerated movement toward universal primary education. USAID's assistance continues to yield impressive results which have equipped the education system with teaching materials and textbooks, trained teachers and government officials, and provided a national school mapping system.

Since 1997, the International Foundation for Education and Self-Help (IF-ESH) has implemented USAID funded projects for in-service teacher training of primary school teachers in all of the eighty-five school districts of Benin. These projects have resulted in significant improvement in teacher classroom supervision and in-service training by school pedagogical advisors—leading to better-planned lesson content and

greater teacher/student interaction.

Through the Ambassadors' Girls Scholarship Program (AGSP), 1271 scholarships were awarded to primary school girls in 39 schools in Benin for the 2007 school year. The scholarship package includes items such as uniforms, shoes, books and school supplies.

"Girls education is one of the major components of USAID's assistance to the Benin education system. Investing in girls is an undeniable element in the promotion of improved health and community development. With increased enrollment of girls we will have educated women that will play key roles in the development of the nation," said Ambassador Brown.

The AGSP has a mentoring component that contributes to the social development of recipients. In Benin, mentors provide home support to scholars to monitor the physical conditions of their study environment and verify the appropriate use of scholarship items. In some cases, mentors hold remedial classes to boost school performance

and raise awareness of HIV/AIDS and the importance of school for girls.

A mentor by the name of Elise Ayoito from the village of Cana Gbagname in the central region of Benin has proved to be of valuable support to the program. Even though she receives no payment of any kind, every morning she checks on the presence of the scholars in school and investigates the motives for absence with the families. During the morning break, she ensures that all students have received their snacks. She checks on the quantity and quality of the food served daily. Mentors in other regions also supply the same type of support.

With Benin's advancements in democracy evidenced by peaceful transfers of power, presidential term limits, an enthusiastic civil society—ethnically diverse and dedicated to ensuring social equality, it is no surprise that support for and commitment to quality education is steadily rising.

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