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BENIN

SUCCESS STORY

Mothers for Girls' Education

Forced Marriage No Substitute for Education



Photo: André Roussel

Above, Madame Céline Nambi, speaks for the Association of Mothers of Students that is fighting to keep girls in school in the rural community of Tabota, in northern Benin.

“Before, girls did not go far in their studies. Today, girls have a chance and they are coming back”, says Céline Nambi, speaking on behalf of the mothers association of Tabota, a remote village in northern Benin. “At first, I was skeptical, but I witnessed mothers taking initiatives and convincing parents to send their daughters back to school.”

USAID partners with World Education on the Girls' Education and Community Participation Project (GECPC). The project works to increase girls' enrollment and retention in primary school in nine northern districts of Benin where the gap between the number of girls and boys in school is most prominent, and the number of girls completing primary school is the lowest. GECPC activities aim to improve the capacities of the primary school parents, *Association de parents d'élèves* (APE) and mothers associations, *Association des mères d'élèves* (AME) to support girls' education, raise awareness about the importance of girls' education, assist girls to enroll, and monitor their attendance. GECPC also works to increase community participation in the management and oversight of the primary schools.

“When the AME motivation caravan started”, says Aime N'Toua Kouambe, Tabota's school teacher, “sixteen girls and one boy were away, many in Nigeria, as the result of abduction, arranged, or forced marriages. Their age: between 10 and 14 years old. AME mothers succeeded in bringing five girls and the boy back to school and are searching for the others. AME members are on the look-out for girls in danger of being abducted or married by force.”

When AME mothers find the parents of a child abductor, they press them to return the girl. If they fail, they file a complaint with law enforcement officials who detain the boy's father until the girl is brought back. At that time, the gendarmes make the abductor's father sign a promise not to abduct children again.

Successful AMEs and APEs show that organized parents can keep boys and girls in school. They also play an important role in improving schools and education at the local level. They convince families that education is important, rescue abducted children, raise money, and build thatched-roof classrooms. They advocate with authorities to build permanent classrooms to support additional students and teachers.