



## CONTENTS

- New USAID Community Health Project.... 1
- Scholarships Keep Girls in School..... 1
- USAID Partners Review Malaria Program... 2
- International Women’s Day..... 3
- Community Preschools to Stop Child trafficking. 4

## USAID \$4.5 MILLION COMMUNITY HEALTH PROJECT STARTS

In Benin, too many children die unnecessarily before reaching age five from illnesses that parents could easily prevent or treat at home, like diarrhea, uncomplicated malaria, or respiratory infections. To increase the chances of these children to sur-

*(Continued on page 2)*



**James Knight, U.S. Ambassador to Benin, compliments Dr. Issifou Takpara, Benin Minister of Health, at the launching of USAID project "Integrated Management of Childhood Illness at Community level (IMCI-C)" held December 15, 2009.**

## Yes, Scholarships Keep Girls in School

The annual award ceremony of Ambassador’s Girls Scholarships took place from January 14th to 30th, 2010 in nineteen schools of northern Benin and twenty-three schools of southern Benin. More than 1,300 scholars were selected by selection committees made up of the school principal or his representative, the mayor, the village chief, a member of the community’s women’s group, the PTA president and two other community members. The scholarship package includes school books, school supplies, backpack, shoes, uniforms and break-

fast. World Education and two local NGOs partners, “Action Communautaire pour le Développement Durable” (ACDD) and “Groupe d’Action pour la Justice et l’Egalité Sociale” (GAJES), organized the event. USAID/Benin’s AGSP manager participated in the ceremonies, as did many parents, education officials, Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), municipal representatives, and students.

"Thanks to the Ambassador’s Girls Scholarship Program, villagers realize that education is an important investment for a good life" said Bienvenu Awidjinou. Awidjinou is the chief of Akassa, a remote village in southern Benin.

Since 2004, scholarships in the form of school supplies, meals, text books, and mentoring are helping the poorest children of Benin to go to school and stay in school. The Ambassador’s



PHOTO USAID AVICE GNONLON

Girls Scholarship Program (AGSP) is part of the African Education Initiative (AEI) that USAID administers in

**Grâce Aloukodé, left, of Akassa school displays her AGSP bag.**

39 countries across Africa, including Benin. The AGSP main objective is to help the poorest girls and boys go to school. In Benin, 845 girls and 456 boys received scholarships in 2010. Since the start of the program, a total of 6,538 Beninese girls and 1,629 boys received scholarships. Nineteen schools of northern Benin and twenty-three schools of southern Benin benefited from the program.

*(Continued on page 4)*

## Family Health Team in Action

### President's Malaria Initiative

On Friday, February 19, 2010, implementing partners of the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI) met for a quarterly review with USAID Family Health Team (FHT). Dr Milton Amayun, the new FHT leader led the review.

Overall, PMI activities are on track. During the review, FHT asked partners to ensure that PMI approaches are implemented efficiently. USAID questions addressed the use by health providers of the comprehensive and



**Dr. Milton Amayun, new Family Health Team Leader, second from the right, chaired his first meeting with PMI implementing partners.**

integrated package of proven prevention and treatment interventions; progress made in strengthening the health system and integrated maternal and child health services; Benin's commitment to strengthening its national malaria control program and to build a capacity for the country to take ownership of malaria control efforts; and progress in the coordination of PMI implementing partners and international and in-country partners.

Partners agreed that coordination to complete activities with the Ministry of Health on time remains a challenge.

USAID stressed that the collection and analysis of data requires careful scrutiny to ensure quality and to reflect the impact of PMI efforts. ■

*(Community Health, continued from page 1)*

ive, USAID works to develop the capacity of local non-governmental organizations to work together with the government's health zones in providing communities with access to basic health care, including anti-malaria prevention and treatment.

In particular, USAID seeks to expand the availability at community level of an integrated package of care, and to ensure that populations receive key messages on immunization and nutrition. USAID's approach supports the Benin Ministry of Health's objective to revive Benin's Village Health Units, an objective that will require close and strong cooperation between health district management teams, NGOs, and civil society.

USAID's new project "Integrated Management of Childhood Illness at Community Level (IMCI-C)" started in October 2009. On December 15, 2009, Professor Issifou Takpara, Minister of Health, officially launched the project in Cotonou. James Knight, U.S. Ambassador to Benin, and Janet Schulman, Acting Director of USAID, represented the U.S. Government at the ceremony.

"The great innovation this project introduces," said Ambassador Knight, "is to strengthen the capacity of local NGOs and other civil

society organizations to work in harmony with the public health sector and be sustainable even after the end of this project."

A workshop followed the ceremony, where Management Sciences for Health (MSH) and Academy for Educational Development (AED), USAID implementing partners, showed how Beninese communities could learn how to manage uncomplicated childhood illness. The project's goal is to reduce the number of their children that die before reaching the age of five. A goal that is at the heart of Benin's Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

Partners followed with presentations that detailed their roles and responsibilities in building up the capabilities of communities to treat infants and young children suffering from malaria, diarrheal diseases, and acute respiratory infections, and to protect their health with timely immunizations and proper nutrition.

A similar meeting was held in Parakou on December 18, 2009, in the presence of the Minister of Health and authorities of the Departments of Alibori, Borgou, and Donga. The health zones concerned, Kandi-Ségbana-Gogounou, Banikoara, Djougou, Bassila-Kopargou-Ouaké, and Tchaourou, are located in these Departments.

To ensure long-term sustainability of the project, USAID and other stakeholders will collaborate closely to empower isolated communities to take ownership of project results. ■

## International Women's Day

### On March 8, International

**Women's Day,** James Knight, U.S. Ambassador to Benin, donated fifteen new motorcycles to the Centers for Social Promotion of the Ministry of Family and National Solidarity. "This donation shows the commitment of our Government and the American people to support policies that promote recognition and acceptance of the rights of Women to be protected by the people and by police authorities and justice," said Ambassador Knight.

Since 2008, the U.S. Government has worked in partnership with the Government and civil society of Benin to reduce violence against women and girls throughout the country. USAID supports training of social decision makers to better enforce the existing laws that punish violence against women and girls. Similarly, USAID seeks to strengthen the capacity and mobility of social actors and the social service centers to respond quickly and effectively to crimes of violence against women. The donation of



Janet Schulman, Acting USAID Director, shakes hand with Marie Thérèse Gbaguidi, head of social services center of Zogbodomè, sitting on a USG-donated motorcycle. Elvire Houenassou, USAID Gender-based Violence project manager, left, looks on.

motorcycles, in addition to office equipment that USAID provided in 2009, will help to ensure better care for women victims of violence and prosecution of offenders. The 1,200 gender-based violence awareness books in the national languages of Fon, Fulani, and Bariba Dendi that

Janet Schulman, Acting Director of USAID, handed out to the Ministry of Culture of Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages will inform people who do not speak French on issues related to violence on women and girls.

"The United States of America and the American people continue to support all policies aimed at increasing gender equity and improving the situation of women who play a key role in accelerating growth and development in Benin," said Ambassador Knight.

The American donation is part of the Women's Justice and Empowerment Presidential Initiative EMPOWER project of USAID. Since 2008, the U.S. Government works in partnership with the Government and civil society of Benin to reduce violence against women and girls throughout the country. In Benin, EMPOWER is implemented by CARE International in collaboration with local NGOs. ■



Janet Schulman, Acting USAID Director, left presents Ganiou Soglo, Minister of Culture and Literacy, with training and information materials on violence against women and girls in national languages and French.



**Ambassador Johnnie Carson**, U.S. Department of State's Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, visited the Republic of Benin on February 5 and 6. At USAID, he listened to and encouraged Benin civil society leaders to work at strengthening Benin's democracy. Benin will hold its next presidential election in 2011. Benin has held free, fair and transparent presidential elections since 1991.

## Staff News

**Milton Amayun, MD, MPH**  
New Family Health Team Leader



On February 15, USAID/Benin welcomed Dr. Milton Amayun as its new Family Health Team Leader. A family physician, Dr. Amayun has training and 30 years of experience with child survival, maternal health, HIV/AIDS and other public health programs in both development and humanitarian emergency settings. He has worked in Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, Eastern Europe and the United States. His most recent appointments have been as vice-president for programs for International Aid, and as focal point for the Global Fund portfolio of World Vision International. In addition, for the last six years, Dr. Amayun was Board President of Christian Connections for International Health. Dr. Amayun holds a Master of Public Health from Harvard University, a Bachelor of Zoology and a Doctor of Medicine degrees from the University of the Philippines. He and his wife Raija, a pediatrician from Finland, have two sons, Joshua, 24, and Jason, 22. ■

*(Yes, Scholarships ...continued from page 1)*

"Please do not tire of helping us" repeated grateful children at the scholarships award ceremony. Smiles on the face of children like Grâce Aloubodé (left on photo, p.1) evidence the scholars' appreciation for the help they receive and the success of the program.

Nearly all scholars continue on to the next grade. "Last year, the sixth grade counted only eighteen students," said Olivier Atchoupa, Akassa School Director. "This year, we have 73 students in fifth grade because the scholarships helped parents to send more of their children to school." In addition to a school kit, children receive mentoring from successful women from the villages who ensure that scholars attend school. When children are home, mentors make

sure they do their homework. Mentors also encourage parents and the community to get involved in the children's education.

"Not only did the school's enrolment rate improve, but the number of children that stay in school also increased," said Atchoupa. AGSP also dramatically improved the academic performance of scholars and the pass rate in the school. Fidèle Gnanglé, the best student of Gnidjazoun school in Bohicon, was an AGSP scholar.

More than the smiles on the faces of scholars, it is their accomplishments in the classroom and the fact that AGSP helps more of them stay in school, that argues in favor of new initiatives to attract and keep children in Benin's school. USAID has extended AGSP until September 2011. ■

By Alice Gnonlonfoun, USAID/Benin

## Community Pre-schools to Stop Child Trafficking

"If the older children are in school, and we parents are out in the fields, who will take care of the babies? » This is the typical reaction of parents in Zakpota when asked to send children to school. Zakpota is a district in the Zou, a department of southern Benin. In rural Benin, while farmers are working the fields, they entrust the care of their infants to older brothers and sisters. This means that the children never go to school and stay illiterate. Soon, these illiterate children fall prey to traffickers, who are often their own parents or a relative.

"After my father died two years ago, my mother told me to go with my uncle to Eko in Nigeria," said David, a twelve year old victim of child trafficking. To entice David and his mother, the uncle promised large sums of money and cloths. At the time, David agreed to follow him. In Nigeria, David worked in a stone quarry and suffered from hunger and physical abuse. In tears David said that he stayed in Nigeria for more than a year, until the day when the

Non-governmental organization "Terre des Hommes" brought him back home with some other trafficked children. Today, David pleads with parents not to send any more children to Nigeria.

Zakpota farmers now recognize that illiteracy is a root cause of child trafficking and are fighting back. To allow older children to go to school instead of staying home to watch over their younger siblings, the Mothers Associations (AME) and Parents Associations in the villages of Dan-Tota, Allohou-Kodota, Adjoko, and Za-Aligoudo, have mobilized to create community pre-schools. UNICEF and USAID's Girls Education and Community Participation project are also helping them.

AME mothers are giving children like David a second chance at getting a primary education. Toddlers are now in preschool, freeing their older siblings to go to school and keeping them out of the reach of child traffickers. Today, David is a fourth grader in the Dan-Tota primary school. ■

By Pierre Achade, USAID/Benin