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USAID Promotes Transparency in the Governance of Benin’s Central Medical Stores

A training workshop funded by USAID was held from August 23 to 27, 2010, in the city of Bohicon in southern Benin. The seminar was organ-

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PHOTO: WORLD EDUCATION

A multi-grade classroom in Benin. Sitting in opposite directions, pupils of each grade face a different blackboard.

Read more below.

Multi-grade Teaching: One Step Toward Improved Access to Quality Education

“I was really surprised when the School Mothers' Association handed me the list of children applying for admission to first grade,” the principal of Toumboutou Primary School in northern Benin said emphatically. “The list was very long! Last year, in 2009, I had to go from house-to-house to find a few children to enroll in our first grade class.” This year, they want to enroll lots of children and we aren't even supposed to start a first grade class!”

In northern Benin, for lack of students, teachers, and buildings to teach all six grades of primary school every year, so-called “bi-annual” schools are common. This means the school would have only grades one, three and five one year and then only the other three grades the next year.

However, the Mothers Association of Toumboutou is lucky. Their school principal wants to help and let the new children enroll in first grade. At other schools, principals refused to open first grade every year as they don't have space or teachers.

The bi-annual strategy hurts en-

More than 60 percent of girls started school in 2009 as opposed to only 26 percent the previous year

rollment, already low in northern Benin. For example, only 31 percent of children in the school district of Karimama, and 41 percent in Malanville are enrolled in school, compared to the 88 percent national enrollment average.

Girls' enrollment is much lower. Since April 2008, World Education, with USAID funding, has been working in over 450 primary schools in five northern school districts to raise primary school enrollment rates, especially for girls, which is significantly lower than national averages. The chief strategy is to mobilize women's efforts through School Mothers' Associations. In Benin, cultural norms prevent women from openly expressing their ideas in front of men. However, through the Mothers' Associations, women are able to speak up and act as a group, and to influence and improve the management of local primary schools. School Mothers' Associations

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(CAME, Continued from page 1)
ized for members of the newly elected Management Committee (COGES) of the CAME—the institution responsible for procurement of essential drugs and consumables for the public health system of Benin.

The objective of this training was to equip members of the COGES to play their role as directors. The training focused mainly on understanding the regulations governing the CAME, and the roles and responsibilities of members of COGES. The ultimate goal is to optimize the performance of the CAME, which now operates in a more transparent framework.

"We acquired the tools for the effective and strategic monitoring of CAME," said Dr. Omer Zounon. "In the end of the five days, the COGES left the training with a first draft of its action plan for the next three years. This shows the relevance of the training, which, I think, makes us better able to assume our roles and respon-

sibilities."

Management Sciences for Health (MSH/SPS), who initially led the evaluation of the CAME, organized



Newly elected members of Benin's Central Medical Stores Management Committee posing with facilitator of capacity building workshop on governance and transparency.

the training under the Strengthening Pharmaceutical Systems program of USAID.

The Government of Benin, in 2008, initiated reforms to allow the CAME to play a more effective role as a pillar of the pharmaceutical system in Benin. For many years CAME had been operating without a clear legal

status. In 2010, with the support of USAID / Benin, CAME has transformed its legal environment and has acquired the status of a not-for profit association. Under its new

status, CAME gains financial autonomy. Following the renewal of CAME's management board, the new COGES was elected in April 2010.

USAID assistance to CAME is funded under the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI). In Benin, more than 45 percent of PMI's budget is spent on medicines and other products to fight malaria. The newly reformed CAME is committed to turning itself into a more effective, efficient, and transparent instrument of Benin's health system. It

is also well aware of the need to find medicines of good quality, at the best price, whenever they need them.

USAID / Benin will continue its support to CAME through other reforms, such as strengthening the information system and formalizing the framework of performance between CAME and its various partners. □

(Multi-grade, Continued from page 1)
complement and balance the male-dominated Parents' and Teachers Associations (PTA). However, the lack of qualified teachers and inadequate school classrooms are problems beyond the reach of School Mothers Associations, no matter how essential their contribution is. Without a place to learn and teach from, little progress can be made raising children's enrollment rates. Having class-rooms where qualified teachers cover two or more grades at a time offers a possible solution.

These multi-grade schools are common in developed countries such as the United States, Canada, and France. They are also seen in other African countries,

such as Guinea, Senegal, and Mali, as well as many Asian and Latin American countries. With USAID support, Benin's Ministry of Primary Education's Institute of Teacher Training and Education Research (INFRE) and World Education, began experimenting with multi-grade classrooms in 2009 in selected "education-deficit" areas.

Results are promising. Karimama, for example, shows a 52 percent increase in first grade enrollment, and 38 percent are girls. This means that more than 60 percent of girls started school in 2009 as opposed to only 26 percent the previous year. The multi-grade classes will allow these students to have qualified teachers all the way through to 6th grade. Similar

good results are also coming in from the other four school districts in the multi-grade classroom experiment. A very satisfied Minister of Primary Education sent a letter to World Education for its multi-grade classroom collaboration with the government and its success in improving access to quality primary school for Benin's children. Successful multi-grade teaching requires specialized training, teaching materials, and close follow-up of teachers. All of which entail the long-term support and commitment of the Benin government. Early indications are that it is doing its part to ensure all of Benin's children can go to primary school every year. □

Submitted by Latifou Yessoufou, World Education Benin

USAID Support to Fight Gender Base Violence Makes Strides in Benin

Déborah is 20 years old. She is married to Djobo. The couple lives in the village of Guiguiso, in northern Benin. During the night of September 9, 2009, three men assaulted the couple while they slept, left the husband bleeding and unconscious, took Deborah away, and then raped her.

After the husband regained consciousness, he alerted the village. The EMPOWER coordinator who lives in the village, promptly informed the police commissioner and project facilitator in the near-by town of Bassila. Before sunrise, the entire population of Guiguiso dashed out in pursuit and caught the criminals.

In Benin, more than 70 percent of women are victims of violence and at least 15 percent are raped. Since 2007, under the Presidential Initiative for Women Justice and Empowerment, WJJEI, USAID works to reduce violence against women and girls in all of Benin's 77 municipalities. A first objective is to promote greater recognition and acceptance of the rights of women in Benin and second, to get

more women who are victims of violence to seek help from the social service centers and from the justice system.

Through the EMPOWER project implemented by CARE International, USAID supports the Benin Government's Social Service Centers (CPS) and local NGO partners, where an increasing number of women victims of violence seek psychological, medical, judicial and emergency financial assistance.

With the help of the project coordinator, the Guiguiso victims sought medical attention from the Bassila hospital. Medical certificates in hand, they went to the police commissioner. After hearing the accused, the victims and the witnesses, the commissioner presented the case to the prosecutor. Today, the three accused wait in prison for their trial.

From November 2007 to September 2010, the U.S. Government helped 1,500 cases of physical and sexual violence to be presented before Beninese courts. As it is very difficult

for Beninese women to press charges against the men who abused them, this is more than 10 times the number planned for the life of the project.

"Before", a Beninese judge said, "we would attempt and resolve cases of gender violence "amicably" and out-of-court. This is no longer possible because of EMPOWER, which helps the victims understand and pursue their case in the court system, and mounting pressure from the media, which act as essential partners in the cause of women justice."

"The injury we suffered as a result of this gang rape may pass with time," Deborah said several weeks after the assault, "but I dare not imagine what life would be for my husband and me, had we not received help from EMPOWER, all the way from the hospital, the police station, and down to the prosecutor's office to press charges." □

Submitted by the EMPOWER project, implemented by CARE International.

USAID Promotes Community Health Insurance in Benin

Ministry of Health Director of Cabinet, Dr. Dorothee Yévidé, and Kevin Armstrong, USAID/Benin Mission Director, launched Benin's first national forum of mutuals, or community-based health insurance schemes in Benin. USAID's Integrated Family Health Project (PISAF) sponsored the event. Since 2006, USAID, has

contributed through the Integrated Family Health pro-

ject, to promote the creation of community health insurance plans in Benin. Despite the initiatives of a number of international donors to contribute to financial access and improved quality of care, the challenge of sustainable and universal coverage in Benin is longer term development. Health insurance plans cover only 6.5% of the population. The forum's goal was to identify innovative strategies to promote and further develop professionalism in mutual health insurance in Benin. □



From left to right: Abt Associates Health Financing Technical Advisor Jeffrey Barnes; Dr. Franz Simeon, PISAF Chief of Party, Kevin Armstrong, USAID/Benin Mission Director, and Dr. Dorothee Yévidé, Ministry of Health Director of Cabinet.

USAID Funds Help 15 African Countries Prepare Against Pandemic Disaster

Kevin Armstrong, USAID Mission Director in Benin, addressed participants of U.S. Africa Command's West Africa Pandemic Disaster Response Exercise during closing ceremonies in Cotonou, Benin, June 25, 2010.

"This conference has really challenged us to think outside our traditional roles of the military in coordination with national, regional, and international organizations. It is only by working under the civilian national disaster assistance authorities that we can succeed in harnessing all of the talent to tackle the toughest of pandemic



Pandemic Disaster Preparedness Exercise participant receives his certificate in the presence of General Mathieu Boni, Benin's Chief of Defense, left, James Knight, U.S. Ambassador to Benin, second from left, and Kevin Armstrong, USAID Mission Director, far right.

manitarian Assistance Medicine (CDHAM), brought together civilian and military representatives from 15 African nations as well as experts from international agencies, to assess and develop national and regional disaster response plans. James Knight, U.S. Ambassador to Benin closed the exercise with a keynote speech and stressed that this exercise is only the first stage of an ongoing effort

disasters," said Armstrong. The five-day exercise, led by U.S. Africa command with funding from USAID and the support of the Center for Disaster and Hu-

to ensure that West Africa's regional and national capabilities for disaster response are developed as fully as possible. □

(From US AFRICOM)

Mission News

USAID Benin Staff Receive Training in Programming Foreign Assistance

From June 14 to 18, USAID Benin hosted a Programming Foreign Assistance training course. Eighteen new and less new USAID staff completed the training. Elise Storck and Gary Scotland, both USAID Senior Management Consultants, led masterfully this information-rich, dense, and hands-on exercise. Participants

particularly appreciated how instructors managed to "keep the group on time and on task" while keeping their interest high on the nitty-gritty details of the U.S. Gov-

ernment's arcane management and budgeting intricacies. James Knight, U.S. Ambassador to Benin welcomed participants. Himself a former economic development



Smiles of content brighten the faces of participants at the conclusion of USAID's Programming Foreign Assistance training.

specialist for USAID in Niger, Ambassador Knight stressed that foreign assistance is an integral part of U.S. foreign policy, and that, as development experts responsible for managing assistance programs in Africa, the role of USAID employees in helping to achieve these objectives is critical. □