



SUCCESS STORY

Meeting the Challenge of Training 9,800 Community Teachers

USAID-supported Innovative In-service Teacher Training Gives Promising Results



Community teachers in training at Sikè training center in Cotonou, Benin. Photo by Pierre Achadé/USAID

“Community teachers are very enthusiastic about this training. They will become certified primary school teachers, and the training is giving them new skills to teach better,” said Mr. Augustin Amagbegnon, the coordinator of the Sikè training center in Cotonou, Benin. The Public School of Sikè is used as a local training center and hosts 207 community teachers, including 33 women.

In Benin, unqualified community teachers make up more than 50 percent of the primary school staff. During the civil servant hiring freeze in the 1990’s, all the teacher training colleges were closed, so communities recruited literate but untrained adults to staff primary schools. In 2008, the Benin government started contracting all the community teachers that had a grade ten diploma and teaching experience.

Community teachers are becoming better classroom teachers

Since 2009 USAID has contributed to this multi-donor effort to train close to 9,800 community teachers to become licensed primary school teachers. The training is coordinated by UNICEF and implemented by the Ministry of Primary Education. Other donors recognized the model as an effectiveness way to address Benin’s critical need for qualified teachers and are also contributing to this innovative initiative. They include the World Bank, the Netherlands, Luxemburg, and UNICEF.

Training follows a hybrid model that combines group, lecture-style training with distance learning and on-site coaching. The group training sessions are held in 69 centers located throughout the country. These sessions supplement distance learning and provide teachers a chance to deepen their pedagogical knowledge. In particular, they learn how to teach the competency based curriculum introduced with USAID support during Benin’s education reform. The impact of this innovative in-service training approach is already apparent. In the mid term evaluation, it showed that before the training, teacher

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knowledge of the curriculum was only 20 percent; and that only 40 percent were able to prepare and teach a class of the competency based curriculum and use modern teaching methods. After one and a half years of the training, virtually 100 percent of community teachers showed a good knowledge of the curriculum and were able to correctly prepare and use a competency based pedagogical approach. In short, the community teachers are becoming much better classroom teachers.

The most important impact is on students' learning. After the 2009 final exams, the Ministry of Primary Education wanted to measure the impact of the training. They conducted a survey on the number of children passing the primary school leaving exam. The survey showed that for the first time, some schools where community teachers are majority achieved the highest passing rates. In these schools, between 68 to 100 percent of Grade six students successfully passed the primary school leaving exam.

“Next year”, exclaimed one of the teachers, “the training will make us even better teachers and we will work hard to make sure that all the children pass the exam.”

The program is to conclude next year, when the community teachers are to take the certification exam to become qualified primary school teachers. □

Submitted by Pierre Achadé, USAID/Benin