



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

BENIN

SUCCESS STORY

Educating Africa's Poorest Children

Scholarships providing meals and mentors help keep children in school



Photo: USAID/André Roussel

The Ambassador's Girls Scholarship Program (AGSP) puts a smile on Rachida Moussa, right, and her mentor, Bernadette Ouinin Mora.

Free lunch is part of what entices scholarship recipients to stay in school.

"Before, I had to take food from home," said Mamanfati Issifou. "Now, thanks to the scholarship lunch, I have lunch at school."

The Ambassador's Girls Scholarship Program (AGSP) started in Benin in 2004, part of the African Education Initiative that USAID implements in 12 West African countries to help the poorest children go to primary school. To date, 4,600 girls have received scholarships. Since 2007, 1,200 of the neediest boys have also received scholarships, including new uniforms, school supplies, and daily lunch.

For many scholarship recipients, lunch is often the only meal they will have each day, and is part of what entices them to stay in school. Most students live far away and travel to school by foot. Without the school meal, they would not eat all day.

Issifou, 12, has been an AGSP scholar since 2004. She attends 6th grade at the Zongo primary school of Parakou, a town in the heart of Benin. Her father died four years ago. Her mother supports her and five brothers by doing laundry, and can only afford school for two of Issifou's brothers. One is in 8th grade, and the other is in his last year of high school. Thanks to the scholarship, Issifou's mother is able to send her to public school with her two brothers. In addition, Issifou is also able to receive help with homework not only from her older brothers, but also from her mentor, Bernadette Ouinin Mora.

Mentors are volunteers and key players in keeping girls and boys in school. A teacher's assistant, Mora visits 35 students in their homes after class, providing advice and supervising their homework. Mora also makes sure to keep parents motivated to let the students study instead of working.

Issifou has great ambition and wants to eventually become a medical doctor. In Benin, the USAID-implemented scholarship program is giving hope to many of the most vulnerable children so that they may also have a brighter future like Issifou.

Telling Our Story
U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
<http://stories.usaid.gov>