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FIRST PERSON

Beatrice Page: Spelling Bee Star

USAID program helps war-affected students complete their elementary school education



Photo: Creative Associates International

Beatrice Page (right), a participant in a USAID accelerated learning program for older students was the winner of the 2009 US Embassy sponsored Bong County Spelling Bee.

Page is one of 4,400 students in Bong County and nearly 30,000 throughout Liberia enrolled in USAID's accelerated learning program.

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Beatrice Page, a student of the Nancy B. Doe Elementary School, Bong Mines, Bong County, Liberia, is a participant in USAID's accelerated learning program which allows students who missed out on schooling due to the collapse of the system to complete six grades in three years. She entered the limelight when she participated in the 2009 spelling bee organized by the American Embassy in Monrovia. Page won a three-round contest in her school, a five-round contest in Gbarnga, the County seat, and hung with the top spellers for the first five rounds, out of 11, at the National Spelling Bee in Monrovia.

Page is 16 years old and the second of six children. Her parents are farmers living in Gbarnga. According to Page, her parents could not afford to send her to school beyond the fourth grade. She decided to move to the area near Bong Mines in order to get a job to fund her education. Page was able to live with a friend, whose mother was generous enough to accept her. She then embarked on a small business venture selling kala (a locally made doughnut eaten with pepper sauce) in order to pay living expenses and send herself to school.

Page said she heard from her friend about the USAID program that would help her complete elementary school more rapidly than younger students. She is doing very well in school and has taken the sixth grade exams. Her dream is to attend one of the best high schools in Gbarnga, preferably St. Martins Catholic High School.

"Spelling is my best subject," said Page when asked why she chose to enter the spelling bee. She described the experience as wonderful, "If I have the chance to do it again, I'll surely do it."

Page is one of 4,400 students in Bong County and nearly 30,000 nationwide enrolled in USAID's accelerated classes.

Page expressed her gratitude to USAID for supporting the accelerated learning program, and she is determined to fulfill her aspirations.