

## Background

The *Education 4 All* program aims to provide better access to primary-level education to young girls in rural areas of Togo, West Africa. Initiated in 2007, this program takes responsibility of educating girls registered in CP2 (primary level 2) class and follows them throughout their primary education, until they receive their Certificat d'Etude du Premier Degré (CEPD). Nukoko is a Canadian nonprofit organization that works in partnership with REJED, a Togo-based youth-run nonprofit organization to deliver the services on the ground associated with this program.



Based on our learning from the previous two editions, achieving the goals of access to quality primary education and the removal of gender disparities in schools requires more emphasis on educating various stakeholders, and on improving the conditions for teaching and learning. Socio-cultural and socio-economic barriers to young girls' education will diminish progressively with ongoing awareness, support and actions at the local rural community levels in particular. School infrastructure, teaching materials and teaching quality, in turn, represent the backbone of a quality education system. This year's edition of the program has paid particular attention to these issues and will continue to work with the communities to break down the barriers.

## Execution Mission

For its third year, the execution mission of *Education 4 All* was held on November 2-6, 2009 in the region of Namaré, a locality situated 25 km north-west of the city of Dapaong in the Savannah region, the most impoverished region of Togo. The program works with five different schools. In addition to delivering school supplies and paying for fees, this mission was marked by raising awareness through ongoing meetings with principals, teachers and parents.

The primary focus of this program is on the education of girls; however the success of girls' education is largely dependent on parental contributions and supports in this area. On November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009 a meeting took place in presence of



the Chief of Namaré with the "Mother's Club," a group of women set up by the Red Cross of Togo. This social-interest club is mandated to educate other women in the community on various development topics. An interactive discussion took place with the Mother's Club, members of REJED and local community leaders to discuss the goals of *Education 4 All*. The 35 women present were informed and empowered to take the message of the importance of girls' schooling to other mothers in the district.



Additionally, during open dialogues with members of REJED and the community, mothers spoke of the girls' overloaded responsibilities in domestic work, thus reducing their study time. Out of these discussions, the mothers were asked to limit child chores so that the children can be more productive academically.

### Meeting with school officials

Discussions that took place with school officials (principals and teachers) of the five schools covered by the program focused on methods to achieve a high academic success rate at the end of the school year. From the discussions, it was established that three key steps must be taken:

- Strengthen capacity of teachers through training;
- Support in schools with educational materials;
- Organize refresher courses for students who do not succeed academically to get themselves up to speed with the necessary knowledge before moving onto the following level.



### Delivery of school kits



This year, 127 girls were fully sponsored. In addition to having their school fees covered, they received school kits consisting of books, manuals, literacy and numeracy and accessories (pens, pencils, eraser, ruler). In addition, other girls from kindergarten through CM2 also received school supplies, allowing over 600 deserving girls to benefit from *Education 4 All*. Each of the five schools received a teaching manual, boxes of chalk and basic first-aid materials.

In addition, a geometry tool kit was given to the Tchakoukonkong School.

*The highest achieving girls were rewarded with a special bag with clothes provided through another partnering Togo-based organization, AGAIB Savanes.*



## Information Communication Technology Literacy

For the first time, REJED introduced students, both boys and girls to Information Communication Technology (ICT) in the five schools. During the mission, basic concepts were taught to a select group of children who were very enthusiastic to learn. For most, if not all of them, it was the first time they were able



to see and touch a computer. Based on the response of this trial experience, when electricity becomes available in the village, ICT is an area that REJED will continue to explore.



## Follow-up/Monitoring Mission

On February 8-12, 2010 REJED spearheaded a follow-up mission in Namaré. There were three main objectives of this mission:

*To monitor the progress of existing Education 4 All activities in general*

- Verification of the actual presence of children at school
- News on the health of children
- Address the needs expressed by the schools
- Follow-up on the activities carried out by the Mothers Club
- Results of the first academic term
- Meeting with President of the Association of Parents of Bouyeme
- Increase awareness to parents in Bouyeme of girls' education
- Discussions on the construction of a classroom in Bouyeme

*Support the school canteens*

- Provide schools with food
- Parental contribution to the program
- Participation of parents in the preparation of the meals

*Continue to conduct research for future projects and activities*

- Electricity
- Health Education

### ***I-Progress of current activities***

The follow-up mission allowed REJED to gather essential information concerning the *Education 4 All* program. According to teachers, all of the children both sponsored through our program and non-sponsored children were present in school. No drop-outs were witnessed in any of the schools, which is very positive news. Previously, there have always been a few students who have left school all together to help their families in the village or 'migrate' to the larger cities to find work, also known as rural exodus. Although it cannot be said with 100% certainty, it can be

deduced that the outreach work conducted by REJED with the communities of the importance of primary education has resonated well with them and is showing visible results.

In regards to the children's health, it was noted that many children suffer from headaches, sore stomachs, and wounds. The contents of the medical kits offered through *Education 4 All* each year to all five schools are insufficient. There is a critical need to strengthen the medical kits in the next editions and explore more solutions and collaborations to better serve the basic medical needs of the villagers. Opportunities for health training and treatment will be explored.

Under the initiative of parents and teachers, a kindergarten was established this year in the Public School of Nandjak. Although the kindergarten was established, there still remain many needs: namely better training to care for younger children, supplies and toys. The benefits of pre-primary education are very positive on child development and methods of supporting this initiative will be further explored.

During the initial visit in November, a meeting was held with the Mothers Club in Nandjak to discuss their participation in *Education 4 All* through outreach activities, with the hopes of leading to improved working conditions of the girls at home and the monitoring of overall school attendance. The most recent visit in February allowed REJED to follow-up with the Mothers Club and on the status of their efforts. Mass awareness as well as door-to-door outreach was held. It was revealed that their efforts led to the reduction of household chores for children, especially girls including tasks such as fetching water, searching for firewood, and working in the kitchen. The Mothers Club also took responsibility for educating parents about the importance of proper hygiene and cleanliness of the children. It is believed that “a healthy mind in a healthy body can only produce good results.” The efforts that the Club has provided are significant and contribute greatly to achieving the objectives of the program.



The academic achievements in the first term are encouraging in 4 of 5 schools, with a close to 70% success rate. Teachers have reassured us that the situation will improve for the remainder of the school year. Despite these positive results, one school in particular, the Catholic Primary School of Bouyeme presents difficulties in this area. According to the school's principal and teachers, parents are largely responsible for the students who do not succeed academically. To further investigate the issue, a meeting took place between teachers, REJED and the Parents Association (established in the 2008-09 edition of the program) represented by its President and one of its members. The discussions were centered around the Association's role in monitoring the children both at school and at home. A clear disconnect was established by the Association's understanding of their responsibility vis-à-vis both the school, parents and students themselves, and REJED's vision. The Parents Association needs more training, information and awareness on their role and of the work they must do to improve the situation of children in school. We will be working with them to address these needs.

In addition, REJED held an awareness meeting open to the entire Bouyeme population. The discussion showed the ignorance of parents on their role in the schooling of their children. Many parents in the region of Bouyeme appeared to be unaware of the importance of education in general. Of more than 300 people who attended the meeting, only seven of them had taken the initiative to go to their child's school to inquire about the academic standing of their child in the first term. This revealed an obstacle in achieving the objectives of the program, as home support



is important for a child's academic success. Not only is encouragement needed, but monitoring provides direct motivation for the children to continue to go to school and study. A very shocking discovery found that according to some parents, poor child outcomes were due to the fact that "they are not intelligent in nature." This demonstrates that blame is being placed solely on the child's cognitive ability without regard for the environmental factors that are even more important in the primary stages of education. The Bouyeme population was made aware that children's success

is not only dependant on their presence at school, but equally important is the support that they receive at home.

This particular awareness meeting has lead to reflections on REJED's strategies in raising awareness during the execution missions at the beginning of each school year. These challenges will be discussed in order to explore more effective ways of individually reaching the parents. Further, we will be examining methods to evaluate the receptiveness levels of the outreach activities and the success of these efforts. It is anticipated that this will greatly improve the situation in these schools and allow children to enjoy a more effective learning environment.

There was an identified need for the construction of additional classrooms in Boueyme. Discussions are still being conducted with partner AGAIB-Savanes for the realization of this project.

### ***II-Support for school canteens***

As a method of improving academic success, an objective of the 2009-2010 edition of *Education 4 All* was to support existing school canteens in the schools covered by the program during the famine period, which typically occurs from March to June every year.

Consequently, the "Nutrition in Schools" initiative was launched with the aims to:

- ✎ Provide healthy food,
- ✎ Increase the enrollment and attendance rates in Namaré,
- ✎ Reduce school drop-out rates and ensure children's retention at school,
- ✎ Improve children's concentration, learning and academic performance.



During the follow-up mission, in-kind contributions of rice were made by REJED to the school canteens to help them better meet the needs. For their part, parents provided bags of millet, sorghum, maize, soya and beans, in addition to okra and baobab leaves for the sauce. The women take turns to contribute in the preparation of the meals. It is important to note that only children whose parents have contributed to the canteen are allowed to take part in the meal program which takes place three times weekly. It should also be noted that although these contributions are appreciated, they are insufficient given the large need. Nukoko will work with REJED to take additional steps to further support these canteens, but still within our means in a sustainable manner.



As results of this investment, we expect:

-  Improved student achievement in their studies
-  A reduction in absenteeism and malnutrition
-  Encouragement of parents to enroll their children
-  An increase in the student attendance rate

### ***III- Future Opportunities***

In addition to seeing how the school canteen program can be extended to better serve the needs of school-going children, Nukoko continues to explore other auxiliary projects to compliment *Education 4 All* and improve the overall welfare of the communities we work with. Research is currently being conducted to explore the feasibility of bringing electricity, through solar panels to the villages. As well, we are working with an American-based nonprofit organization to investigate how to better promote health literacy for adolescent girls. Updates will be provided as these initiatives begin to take form.

### **Conclusion**

Through the third edition of *Education 4 All*, over 600 girls are being provided with better access to education; the five schools we work with are being supported with teaching materials and medical kits; and the people Namaré are being informed and educated of the importance of girls education. The follow-up mission was extremely valuable as it detected some very critical information for improving the program's performance moving forward.

The annual cost for child sponsorship is \$30cnd /girl. Generous corporate supporters continue to donate their services and funds to help Nukoko cover its overhead costs, ensuring that **100% of individual donations go directly to our projects.**

*Nukoko would like to thank its supporters and child sponsors for making the 2009-2010 edition of Education 4 All possible!*

*We acknowledge that there is still much to be done, however welcome those with an interest in the cause to join us in helping to meet the challenges of basic education for all.*