

A project designed to improve children's nutrition and school enrollment in a sustainable way through the work of their communities.

July 2012.

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McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program

Bui Division, NW Region of Cameroon, 2008 - 2012

Bui is a remote and relatively inaccessible part of Cameroon. The population, which includes the nomadic Mbororo, struggles with poverty, malnutrition and low school enrollment rates, especially for girls.

To reverse the situation, Counterpart International, with funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and support from sub-partner Nascent Solutions, has implemented the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program (FFE) since 2008 in partnership with the Ministry of Education, parent-teacher associations (PTAs), teachers, farmers and community leaders in 92 villages of Bui Division. The project officially ends Sept. 30, 2012, but its work will continue once Counterpart has gone.

The FFE project includes school feeding, take-home rations, health and nutrition curriculum development, growth monitoring, school infrastructure improvements and establishment of school gardens. After almost four years, the outcomes have been striking:

- 377 infrastructure facilities in schools, such as separate latrines for boys and girls, stores, kitchens, classrooms and storage facilities, have been constructed or rehabilitated with the participation of PTA members.
- 4,260 community members, including PTA leaders, teachers, cooks and farmers, have been trained in food preparation, storage techniques, hygiene and sanitation, school action plan development, crop production and post-harvest management.
- 50 school gardens and farms were established to complement the donated food items and to sustain the project indigenously. 1,300 PTA members and teachers were trained on modern techniques in gardening and arable crops production, fruit tree propagation and post-harvest management of food crops and vegetables. The project bought and distributed farm and garden tools, materials for sprinkler irrigation systems, improved varieties of vegetables and improved seeds.
- A health and nutrition curriculum has been developed and handbooks produced for primary schools (a teachers' guide, a pupils' book for grades 1-6 and a pupils' manual).



- The growth and health of 6,146 children have been monitored every month.
- More than 7.5 million meals and take-home rations have been distributed to schoolchildren and to families having children younger than 5.

The project's impact on enrollment and attendance has been dramatic:

- The number of students benefiting, 32,246, is up from 13,543 at the beginning of the project, a 138 percent increase in enrollment.
- The attendance rate in project schools increased from 93.5 percent at the start of the project to 98.8 percent in the 2011-12 school year.

Lasting Support

The project was designed for sustainability, and the communities will continue the school feeding after the project ends. From the start, project schools received seeds and tools for their gardens; more importantly, Counterpart trained nearly 1,300 PTA members, teachers and community members on proper nutrition, modern gardening and arable crop production techniques, fruit tree propagation, and post-harvest management of food crops and vegetables. Project schools are equipped with newly

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constructed stores, storage facilities and kitchens. To further boost PTA commitment, the project organized school garden competitions, and different schools emerged victorious – proof of the competitive nature of the schools. As of September 2011, school gardens had produced 105 metric tons of food commodities (excluding vegetables).

Knowledge spreads beyond every school's walls. As a result of Counterpart's training, many farmers in the beneficiary communities have increased the productivity and revenue of their farms and gardens. With increased capacity in crop production and school feeding management, some of the schools are now capable of providing students two to three meals per week from food harvested from school gardens or bought with money gained from the sale of produce from them.

As the project draws to an end, Counterpart has intensified strategies to sustain its initiatives.

The participatory approach of the project, from start to finish, has made it more sustainable. Stakeholders have met regularly to share best practices, identify weaknesses and find opportunities. This approach has engendered greater participation of PTA members, traditional leaders and locally elected authorities, particularly in school garden activities.

As a result, some traditional leaders have donated more land for school gardens, and some councils have committed to budgetary allocations for school feeding.

In response to requests from participating schools, Counterpart has presented refresher courses on crop production and provided schools with additional improved seeds and seedlings, gardening tools and fencing materials. School managers were also drilled on following up the activities of the beneficiary schools, and Counterpart has encouraged the Government of Cameroon to prioritize school feeding in the basic education sector.

The government seems inclined to do so: "Your experience shall be replicated in other regions of the country," Madam Alica Montheu, in charge of school canteens at the Ministry of Basic Education, said after a project visit. "Other countries should visit your program because it is a satisfying inspiration for schools. We shall return to Yaoundé quite satisfied."



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