

Progress report following June-July 2009 trip to Nigeria

For ease of reference, I will group everything in this progress report under different subject headings.

Photos/video clips: Note: a weblink to a PowerPoint presentation of 30 different photographs including many of the things described in this update was sent along with this document in an e-mail message. If you lost or deleted the link, e-mail me at smpegg@iupui.edu and I will re-send it to you. I hope to have a number of short video clips (tours of the schools in both Bane and Bodo, interviews with some of the Bebor alumni, interviews with some of the teachers, etc.) posted soon either online on the school's website or on YouTube. I will send out another e-mail informing you when those video clips are available to see.

Nigeria/visiting Nigeria/the Niger Delta: Over the years we have taken seven different donors with us to visit the schools in Nigeria. Everyone has always enjoyed the experience and we have never had any significant problems on any of our trips. Given the surge in kidnappings and violence in the Niger Delta throughout 2007 and 2008 and given that I was asked by my friends there not to visit in February 2008, I felt that I needed to go alone this time just to make sure everything was okay. I'm pleased to report that everything was fine and, in a number of ways, it has gotten easier to visit Nigeria. You can now fly direct from Atlanta to Lagos on Delta Airlines without going through Europe. The 11.5 hour flight is long but it beats 8 hours to Europe, 2 or 3 on the ground there and then another 6 hours to Nigeria. I spent a day in Lagos visiting with my friends Bode and Yemi Oluwafemi and was pleasantly surprised to see a number of positive changes there. The governor of Lagos State has apparently decided that he should actually govern instead of just loot money from the state treasury and all sorts of infrastructure projects have been completed or are under way. Perhaps most impressively, Lagos has a new domestic airport that is a huge improvement over the old one. The old airport always seemed like going into a rugby scrum; the new one is quite civilized. You can even buy domestic plane tickets in advance now so the days of showing up with cash 30 minutes before the flight are over. Port Harcourt does not show nearly the same level of improvement that Lagos does, although the governor has seemingly built 12 or 15 new covered bus shelters with some of the billions of dollars of oil revenues he controls. Cellphones, which seemed to be everywhere in 2006, truly are everywhere in 2009. Even in the villages, it's now easier to count the number of people who do not have them than the number of people who do. One sign of "progress" I was less than happy with is that the plantain chips that you can buy from walking vendors in traffic jams now come in pre-packaged sealed bags with labels on them. Most importantly, though, Port Harcourt and the surrounding areas leading to and from the villages felt no different to me than they did in 2005 or 2006. The Niger Delta is still far from settled and will likely appear in the news at periodic intervals, but there were just no problems visiting and I moved about like I always have and visited the places I always do. I was perfectly comfortable jumping out of our van to run after Patrick Naagbantou so I could film him directing traffic on two separate occasions in what the Nigerians call "go-slows." I look forward to hopefully taking a few more of you with me on future trips.

Existing state of the school in Bodo: The progress at the school in Bodo over the past few years is just phenomenal. I remember seeing Ben Harper play in Indianapolis one time and he said something to the effect that you guys have made me so high that I'll be awake to see the sun rise tomorrow morning. I'm not that extreme and I was able to go to sleep that night but turning

on the community taps to the school's new borehole and flushing one of the toilets in the school's new latrines were two of the highest and greatest moments of my life so far. For those of you who have lived in the US and maybe travelled to Europe or Australia, it's hard to put this into context but going from no running water to running water on command and no toilets to toilets in Bodo is one of the greatest accomplishments we have ever achieved with this project. Thanks so much to Gary Foxcroft and our partners at Stepping Stones Nigeria who generously funded the entire cost of the borehole while our donors funded the costs of the latrines. The borehole and latrines are now both fully functional and operating.

The final classroom in Bodo is more or less complete with only minor work remaining. The entire building is done other than just a few window frames and one big double door frame for the Bjarne and Alessandra Tellmann assembly hall. The Tijen Pegg Mothers' Association is currently using the assembly hall a few days a week as the temporary home for their sewing machine workshop. This is a less than ideal situation which we hope to remedy soon.

One fantastic moment from this trip was meeting with the Bebor Ambassadors for the first time. The Ambassadors are basically what we would call an alumni association – essentially students who have graduated from Bebor Model Nursery and Primary School and, in most cases, gone on to various local secondary schools. Hearing how well some of these kids have done since they left Bebor and hearing them talk about how much their primary school education meant to them was very uplifting.

The realities of Nigerian village life periodically force themselves onto your conscience or into your thoughts and that experience for me this trip occurred one day at the nursery school section of the school in Bodo. The school day had just ended so we were mostly just taking some pictures with the kids and hanging out with them. I noticed a number of "okadas" or motorcycle taxis pulling up while we were taking pictures. I asked Reverend Moses about this and he told me that the students who lived very close to the school usually walked home. The students who lived further out or in neighboring villages generally hired okada drivers to take their kids to and from the school. I saw two, three and, in a few cases, four kids riding on one okada (all of which are 100 or 125 cc Chinese motorcycles). I met a mother who came on an okada from two villages away to pick her two children up and go home with them. While the fact that a mother would bring her kids from two villages away to come to our school is a tremendous vote of confidence and sign of success in what we are doing, it was hard watching all these very young kids leave on okadas to go home. If any of you have ever received thank you letters from Reverend Moses where he talks about the need for a conveyance van, this is the situation he wants to address.

Future priorities for the school in Bodo: There are a number of different projects that Reverend Moses would like to pursue in the future including such things as a conveyance van as noted immediately above and a classroom building for a secondary school he hopes to launch to address a number of serious problems or weaknesses with the existing secondary schools Bebor graduates now have to choose from. When pressed repeatedly by me to specify priorities, Reverend Moses's clear # 1 most immediate priority is building a permanent home for the Tijen Pegg Mothers' Association (TIPEMA) and their sewing machine workshop. The women have already purchased land very close to the school for this. Reverend Moses wants a permanent home for TIPEMA for two reasons. The more immediate reason is to give the sewing machine workshop a permanent home and get it out of the school's assembly hall so that space can be

used purely for nursery and primary educational purposes. Having the sewing machines permanently set up in one secure location will enable TIPEMA to greatly expand their use and the number of local women trained to use them. The less immediate but maybe more important reason is basically that Moses feels that TIPEMA has been the driving force behind much of the school's success to date and he wants to do everything he can to strengthen the women and their association and further solidify their role in and connection to the school. Essentially, Moses believes that if the schools had to depend on support from men they would have collapsed years ago. Women have been the primary leaders and supporters of the school since its inception and Moses believes that helping them to secure a permanent home will bring countless longer-term benefits directly to the school. Moses indicated to me that he felt a permanent home for TIPEMA could be constructed for 1,000,000 Naira (approximately US\$6,667 at current black market exchange rates). Both Patrick Naagbantou and I felt that this figure was probably too low and would not suffice. Given my insistence on local cost-sharing from the mothers, particularly given that the sewing machines were intended to generate revenue for them, I told Moses that we would commit to providing 1,000,000 Naira of total funding for this project, payable in two or three installments so progress can be monitored adequately and that any costs beyond this would have to be met locally.

There is one other immediate priority that I am pursuing for personal reasons. The school in Bodo established the Gerry Neils Memorial Band in 2003 to honor my late uncle who was a large contributor and keen supporter of this project. When my aunt Pat Neils died last year, they changed the name of the band to the Pat and Gerry Neils Memorial Band. As all of the band equipment (mostly drums) was purchased with local funding, they initially bought the very cheapest instruments they could find. Many of the drums have now broken and need to be replaced. Moses estimated that high quality new band equipment that would fully equip the kind of band they wanted and last many years would cost 100,000 Naira (about US\$667). This is perhaps not as essential as boreholes or latrines but it is a great morale booster for the school and quite popular when they travel to take part in other ceremonies or outside events. Given all the cutbacks to arts and music education in the US public schools, I'm also happy to promote music education at Bebor. Because my mom, Tijen and I and one of Gerry's daughters have all contributed far more to the school than the cost of this band equipment, I made an on-the-spot decision to fund this immediately. See below for more band information in Bane.

The Bodo oil spill: It is impossible to convey the deep sense of outrage and disgust I felt seeing the environmental devastation wrought by the Bodo oil spill more than 7 months after it was finally capped. Mangrove forests which are uniquely valuable to the local population as nesting areas for fish and shellfish have been destroyed as far as the eye can see. The spill which Shell has now admitted was not caused by sabotage but by pipeline failure started in August 2008 and continued until November 2008 when it was finally capped. Shell has made no serious effort to clean up the spill or to compensate local residents for the damages they suffered. Fishing is second only to farming in terms of employment in Bodo and this oil spill decimated the shellfish population and killed or forced the swimming fish population far away from the area. On May 2, 2009, representatives from Shell showed up in Bodo and tried to offer the community a few dozen bags of rice and other basic food supplies as compensation for destroying the community's main sources of protein. Local youths shouted them down and told them to leave the village. Subsequently, on the same day we paddled out into the river in a traditional fishing canoe to investigate the oil spill damage (July 1, 2009) Shell representatives visited the paramount ruler of

the community. Shell has loudly proclaimed for more than a decade that it will not work behind a military shield yet the company's representatives came to the village with three truckloads of heavily armed mobile police (I came unarmed). Whether Shell has succeeded in bribing the paramount ruler or any others into accepting its ridiculous compensation offer of bags of rice, I do not know. What is clear is that the spill has never been cleaned up and it has done irreparable damage to the local environment.

One of the sadder things to see at the riverfront is a series of fishing canoes coming back from the spill site with dead mangrove trees that they have chopped down to sell as firewood. In many ways, this is a very logical and rational economic response to the oil spill. Since their main occupation has been destroyed for whatever length of time, the fishermen need to find other work to support themselves and their families. Since the oil spill has destroyed the roots of the mangrove trees, they are going to ultimately collapse anyway. As such, the fishermen are harvesting the already dead trees to sell as firewood. All along the riverfront you can see piles and piles of mangrove trees that have been cut down for this reason. Meanwhile, on the water, it is environmental devastation as far as you can see and smell.

Another dynamic that has resulted from this oil spill which has a logical economic explanation is declining per capita fish consumption. The local supply of fish and shellfish has plummeted dramatically due to the oil spill. As basic economics suggests, when the supply of something falls dramatically, the price increases. The increased price of fish combined with the decreased income of the local fishermen has naturally led to local families eating less fish. As fish is the leading source of protein in the area, this carries worrying nutritional outcomes which have only just begun to appear and certainly have not yet been properly studied or documented.

Amnesty International's comprehensive new June 2009 report "Nigeria: Petroleum, Pollution and Poverty in the Niger Delta" opens up with two pages on the Bodo oil spill, much of which cites the pioneering work of our friends at the Center for the Environment, Human Rights and Development in documenting this corporate-induced environmental disaster.

Existing state of the school in Bane: As those of you who read the school's 2008 annual report know, we had a bit of a miscommunication or lack of communication with Steve and Leelee Wiwa Tanen, the school directors in Bane which led to them not receiving any funding at all from us in 2008. I'm happy to report that this situation has now been resolved and, as I suspected all along, everything was fine with how our previous funds were used. The school in Bane is now completely done with both of its classroom buildings. The one building was finished in 2004 and the other one was framed and roofed in 2006 with the cement floor put in during 2007. They used our remaining funding to put secure metal bars and frames around all the windows and secure metal doors in the entrances. The metal window and door frames obviously added to the overall cost of the building but given the general insecurity and rising crime in the Niger Delta, this was a prudent decision on Steve and Leelee's part. Everything is now finished and we are 100% out of classroom building in Bane.

Future priorities for the school in Bane: There are three immediate future priorities for the school in Bane. First, and most immediately, we will pursue a borehole for drinking water like the one we just finished in Bodo. We will use the same contractors and the same design as in Bodo on the grounds that it worked well there so there's no need to do anything different in Bane. In Bodo, we actually started on latrines before we secured the funding from Stepping

Stones Nigeria for the borehole. That was actually putting the cart before the horse as the latrines need water to flush the toilets and use for washing your hands. In Bane, we will get the water first and then move into latrines. The other big reason they want the water first is that it will both facilitate and reduce the costs to build a cement fence (they call it the “Berlin wall” in Bodo) around the school’s property in Bane. The borehole water can be used in mixing cement on site which will save money from having to buy and transport already formed cement blocks. As such, our first priority in Bane is a borehole. After that is finished, we will either then move next into latrines followed by a fence or a fence followed by latrines.

Upon returning from Nigeria, one of our long-time supporters, Mary Wark, contacted me and asked about making some sort of donation to honor her husband Jim’s upcoming 50th birthday. Jim is a huge music lover and a guitarist who once played in a reggae band where he was known as “the pastafarian.” When I knew him in Richmond, Virginia, he played in a great blues band called Lil’ Ronnie and the Blue Beats. I shared an early draft of this report with Mary and told her about the Pat and Gerry Neils Memorial Band in Bodo and asked her if she wanted to do something similar for Jim in Bane. She immediately got behind the idea and is donating and getting a corporate matching fund contribution for her donation to fully fund a similar band in Bane which will be called the Jim Wark Half Century Band in honor of Jim’s 50 years on the planet. We’re extremely grateful for Mary’s donation, excited to honor Jim and happy that the school in Bane will also have first-class band equipment as part of its facilities.

Scholarship funding for both schools: One of the problems I noted in our 2008 annual report was that our tuition fee scholarship funding for the poorest students at both schools has been somewhat irregular or erratic. In some cases, this has been because of when we delivered funds to the schools. In other cases, it has been because of delays in hearing back from either or both schools about how our previous funding had been used. In a joint meeting with Patrick Naagbantou (whose organization the Center for the Environment, Human Rights and Development we now wire money through), myself and the school directors from both Bane and Bodo, we agreed that in the future our scholarship funding would be delivered 50% in September at the start of the school year and 50% in January at the start of the second semester. Our first round of scholarship funding under the new scheme will be delivered to both schools this September.

Funding delivered in June-July 2009: Shortly before my trip, the Timmy Foundation wired US\$8,000 of funding to the Center for Environment, Human Rights and Development on behalf of the schools in Bane and Bodo. During my visit, we verified that this funding had arrived and Patrick gave me a written receipt for it. In conversations with Patrick, Moses, Steve and Leelee and others, the following distribution of that funding was agreed:

\$3,000 of scholarship funding divided evenly between the two schools with Bane and Bodo each receiving \$750 in September 2009 and \$750 in January 2010.

500,000 Naira (approx. US\$3,333) for the permanent home for the Tijen Pegg Mothers’ Association sewing machine workshop in Bodo. This will be delivered in at least two separate installments to ensure proper accountability.

100,000 Naira (approx. US\$667) for the Pat and Gerry Neils Memorial Band in Bodo.

100,000 Naira (approx. US\$667) for the Jim Wark Half Century Band in Bane.

50,000 Naira (approx. US\$333) to the environment and conservation program at the Center for Environment, Human Rights and Development to run a 10-part water quality analysis test comparing the quality of water from the borehole at the school in Bodo to well water from Bodo, stream water from Bodo and World Health Organization basic standards for drinking water. This is intended to give us scientific data and evidence on exactly how good the quality of the borehole water is or is not in order to inform us on whether or not we need to think about some sort of water filtration system in the future. This report will ultimately be circulated and posted on the www.bebor.org website when it is finished.

Next round of funding to be delivered: We hope to deliver funds for the borehole in Bane in the next few months.

Questions/need for additional information: Contact Scott Pegg at 317-722-1978 or smpogg@iupui.edu.

Thanks for your past, present and hopefully continued support of the Bebor Model Nursery and Primary Schools in Bane and Bodo, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Scott Pegg, Indianapolis, July 21, 2009.