

International Friends Committee of Bebor Model Nursery/Primary School

2007 Annual Report

March 1, 2008

“This is not a program dedicated to building medical schools or even stamping out a pandemic. At its heart, it is a program that screams ‘Yes’ in a world ready to say ‘No’. This program puts love and compassion front and center. Those values build the rest. When that message is embraced here, we can go home. We are unable to stop what is happening, but we are rock solid in keeping to our core message.” – Dr. Joe Mamlin, field director for the IU Kenya Program, writing from Eldoret just days after violence erupted following Kenya’s flawed presidential elections.

This is the sixth in a series of annual reports delivered by the International Friends Committee of Bebor Model Nursery/Primary School (BMN/PS). Previous annual reports are available online through the school’s <http://www.bebor.org> website.

In three separate funding rounds in March, May, and November, we were able to provide the schools with \$11,000 of funding in 2007. This is down from \$15,900 worth of funding in 2006, a figure that was significantly influenced by \$6,100 worth of funding provided that year by our partners at the Timmy Foundation for two specific projects. Still, the \$11,000 of funding slightly exceeds the \$10,600 provided in 2004 and is much higher than the amounts provided in any other previous year. By the end of 2007, we had collectively provided BMN/PS with \$60,000 worth of funding.

Of the funding we provided in 2007, \$6,000 went to the school in Bane to continue work on their third and final classroom building. Another \$3,000 went to the school in Bodo to continue work on their third and final classroom building. The Bane figure is higher merely because they were able to provide us with quicker photographic evidence and accounting statements documenting the progress made with the last round of funding than was the school in Bodo.

One of the highlights of our funding in 2007 was the fact that we were able to double the amount of scholarship funding provided to each school. Whereas we had been able to provide \$500 to each school in tuition fee scholarship funding in 2005 and 2006, we were able to double that amount to \$1,000 to each school in 2007. This was made possible for a couple of reasons. First, it is thanks to the continued generous support of our friends at Gardens Presbyterian Church in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida who have supported our tuition fee scholarship program for many years through their vacation Bible school. Second, we are also grateful to a number of individual donors who provided scholarship funding. Finally, it is in large part due to the generosity shown toward this program at the Timmy Foundation’s annual dinner in November 2007 that we could dramatically increase the amount of scholarship funding provided in 2007 and be confident that we could sustain it at this level in 2008. The funding we have provided should enable about 50 of the poorest students at each school (Bane and Bodo) to attend class this academic year.

A major achievement for us in 2007 was the expansion and significant upgrading of the <http://www.bebor.org> website. My thanks go out to Andrew Nelson, Kerry Hanson, Chad Trice and Accurate Image for all their incredible free-of-charge help here. The site now has a couple of YouTube-like video clips on it. It has a new documents and reports section which has all of our annual reports, Timmy Foundation annual reports and other such documents in one central location. We also added updated photos and weblinks throughout the site. Perhaps most importantly, I am now able to make many of the changes and updates to the site myself so things should now move much faster in that regard. If you have not visited the site in awhile, please take some time and bounce around it a bit to see all the changes for yourself.

In 2007, we took a tiny step toward providing income-earning economic opportunities by selling 10 shoulder bags in the official Tijen Pegg Mothers' Association colors that came from the sewing machine workshop we established in 2006. We hope to have more bags to sell soon and to continue to develop other such economic opportunities in the future.

We also continued in 2007 to develop further our partnership with [Stepping Stones Nigeria](#), a British non-governmental organization engaged in similar work in nearby Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Gary and Naomi from Stepping Stones visited our schools in Bane and Bodo in 2006 and have just done incredible work with their project. They are true kindred spirits and we look forward to collaborating more closely with Stepping Stones in the future and expanding our partnership in new directions.

In our 2005 annual report, I highlighted the increasing political instability in the oil-producing Niger Delta and noted that this deteriorating situation had fortunately not affected either of the two villages (Bane and Bodo) where the schools are located. Last year, in our 2006 annual report, I noted that the political and security situation in the Niger Delta continued to deteriorate and that it had finally started to affect one of the villages we work in – Bodo – where over 10 people were killed in fighting between two different cult or militia groups in July 2006. Unfortunately, the Niger Delta and particularly Rivers State where our schools are located continued to deteriorate throughout 2007. Kidnappings of expatriates approximately doubled from 80 in 2006 to 163 in 2007. Oil production shut-ins due to militant attacks in the Niger Delta ranged as high as 850,000 barrels per day in some months and averaged 20-25% of Nigeria's estimated 3,000,000 barrels per day of production capacity throughout the year. Peace treaty negotiations with some of the militant groups collapsed in December and one militant group responded by spraying bullets at the Presidential Hotel in Port Harcourt on New Year's Eve. That particular incident struck close to home as the Presidential Hotel is next to the street where we always change money in Port Harcourt.

Unfortunately, in 2007, there were violent incidents leading to deaths in both of the villages our project is based in. In Bodo, as I noted in last year's annual report, there was a small conflict between Bodo and the neighboring village of Mogho in February 2007. Apparently, an old woman from Mogho was found dead near the border with Bodo. Mogho residents assumed Bodo people were involved and started harassing Bodo residents passing through the transit junction in their village. Ultimately, they killed a popular mini bus driver from Bodo. A number of Bodo residents then attacked Mogho, destroying dozens of homes

and killing 10 people. Although peace and calm between the two communities has now been restored, the violence led the parents of approximately 40 children from Mogho to pull their kids out of our school in Bodo. There was not any problem with the school in Bodo per se. Rather, the Mogho parents simply did not want their children leaving their village for Bodo at all. In September 2007, an army task force invaded Bodo searching for members of the Deebam cult group. Apparently, the Deebam members were tipped off about the action ahead of time and left the village by boat before the army arrived. The soldiers then subsequently arrested a number of villagers and destroyed a few homes in the village.

Bane, the other village we operate in, had remained peaceful throughout 2006. In July 2007, there was a clash there between the Deebam and Deewall cult groups. Two people were killed and a number of homes and vehicles were destroyed during the fighting.

I need to emphasize here that our schools are by no means targets or focuses of this violence and instability that increasingly pervades the Niger Delta. We are not targets for two main reasons. First, and most importantly, we are not doing anything controversial. We are not spilling oil and polluting these people's farms and sources of drinking water. We are not trying to convert them or change their religion. We do not depend on military protection to operate in the area. We are simply trying to provide them with basic facilities for a good primary education and that is widely recognized in both communities. Second, we have cultivated good relations with the local communities over a number of years now and our school directors are widely known and respected for their work in the villages.

While the violence and instability in the Niger Delta is of great concern, it also highlights the importance of the work we are doing as indicated by the quote at the beginning of this report from my colleague Dr. Joe Mamlin. Dr. Mamlin works with AMPATH (the Academic Model for the Prevention and Treatment of HIV/AIDS, also known as the [IU Kenya Program](#)) and is based in Eldoret, Kenya. His quote comes from a letter he wrote a few days after Kenya's disputed elections resulted in widespread violence in western Kenya where they provide treatment to more than 50,000 HIV+ Kenyans. Our project is miniscule in comparison to the heroic work that my friends at AMPATH are doing. Yet, if you change Dr. Mamlin's first sentence in this quote to read "This is not a program dedicated to building nursery and primary schools" you can then pretty much leave the rest of the quote unchanged and move it across the continent from East Africa to West Africa and apply it to what we are doing. As I noted last year, the Niger Delta has been and continues to remain a difficult environment in which to operate. While corruption has defeated much larger projects with much greater resources than we have, for more than 7 years now we have been able to demonstrate consistent and tangible results. We remain in close contact with the school directors and others in the local area. If and when the instability ever reaches such a level that we need to change how we do things or postpone some of our goals, we will adjust our operations accordingly. Fortunately, we have are not anywhere near that point right now. Indeed, we are hopeful that a major peace ceremony in Bodo in January 2008 where 70 local youths publicly renounced their membership in various cult groups will mark the start of a more peaceful 2008. Whatever happens with the larger environment of the Niger Delta, we will continue to say yes in a part of the world where far too many people have already said no.

Our immediate priorities for the short-medium term future remain four-fold: 1) to finish construction on the third and final classroom buildings at each school – a goal we are rapidly nearing completion on; 2) to finish construction (Bodo) and start construction (Bane) on boys, girls and teachers latrines for each school; 3) to provide boreholes for drinking water at each school; and 4) to continue to provide and hopefully expand the number of tuition fee scholarships for the poorest students at both schools. There are a number of other projects we would like to undertake in the future such as providing better teacher training, providing water filtration systems for clean drinking water, or creating new economic opportunities as we have done with the sewing machine workshop in Bodo, but those are our most pressing immediate goals.

In moving forward with these and other goals, we will remain humble, sincere, honest and accountable in our service to some of the poorest people on the planet. We will also ensure that administrative and organizational costs are absorbed in other ways so that 100% of your donations actually reach the schools in Nigeria. In addition to absorbing a number of costs myself, we are grateful to our partners at the Timmy Foundation, Dr. Owens Wiwa, AFRIDA, David Serrins, Indiana University, Andrew Nelson, Accurate Image, Patrick Naagbanton and the Center for the Environment, Human Rights and Development, all of whom absorbed costs or donated services free of charge in 2007 in order to ensure that for every \$100 you donate, \$100 actually gets to BMN/PS.

Our largest debts remain, as always, to two groups of people. First, to our partners in Nigeria, whose dedication, integrity and honesty make everything we do possible. Second, to you, our international donors, who have chosen to support this tiny and sometimes slow moving effort to bring the benefits of primary education to children in the rural Niger Delta. We appreciate your confidence and vision in supporting this micro-scale project in a demanding environment and we will strive to earn and maintain that confidence every day. Together, we are able to make a positive and tangible difference in the lives of hundreds of the talented and beautiful children of the rural Niger Delta.

If you have any questions or need more information, please don't hesitate to get in touch via smpogg@iupui.edu or 317-722-1978. As always, thank you so much for your past, present and hopefully continued support of this grassroots development project.

Thanks,

Scott Pegg,
Chairman, International Friends Committee of Bebor Model Nursery/Primary School