

International Friends Committee of Bebor Model Nursery/Primary School

2008 Annual Report

May 26, 2009

“To be honest, writing of the plight of the oppressed is not a particularly effective way of assisting them.” – Dr. Paul Farmer, *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights and the New War on the Poor*, p. 26.

“There is probably no higher return on investment in the developing world than primary and secondary education for girls.” – Dr. Lawrence Summers, Director of the National Economic Council and Assistant to the President for Economic Policy

This is the seventh in a series of annual reports delivered by the International Friends Committee of Bebor Model Nursery/Primary School (BMN/PS). Previous annual reports are posted online in the documents and reports section of the school's <http://www.bebor.org> website.

In three separate funding rounds in February, August, and November, we were able to provide the schools with \$12,500 of funding in 2008. This is up slightly on the \$11,000 of funding provided in 2007 and increases our average funding over the past five years to \$11,400 per year. By the end of 2008, we had collectively provided BMN/PS with \$72,500 worth of funding.

The funding provided in 2008 was unusual in the sense that 100% of it went to the school in Bodo with none of it going to the school in Bane. The reason for this was basically a temporary breakdown in communications between me, Owens Wiwa and the school in Bane that has now been resolved. Essentially, the school in Bane had not fully accounted for how it had used the funding we provided them in March 2007. One of the cardinal principles of this entire project has always been that the schools must account for how they have used each round of funding before we can send them the next round of funding. This simple rule has been essential to our success so far and it is not something that I am willing to compromise on. Although I knew from both our extensive past experience with the school in Bane and from other communications that everything was fine, I felt that maintaining this principle was far more important than being able to say we delivered \$3,000 or \$4,000 more funding in 2008. In essence, I made the decision to trade some delay in moving forward in Bane even when we had funding on hand to do so for maintaining the sanctity of the “all funding must be accounted for before additional funding can be distributed” rule. The problem with many larger development projects in this regard is not that they move too slow but rather that they move too fast and do so without adequate monitoring and evaluation of how previously distributed funds have been used. My belief has always been that it is far more important to get it right than it is to do it fast and that is why we did not disburse any funds to Bane in 2008. I am pleased to report that eventually this message did get through and the school in Bane has now successfully accounted for how our past funding has been used. Other than the extended delay in communications, everything is fine

and I fully anticipate getting things 100% back on track and moving forward again in Bane in 2009.

In contrast to Bane, the school in Bodo did quite well both in using the funding we provided them and quickly accounting for how it was used so we could send additional funding. With the \$12,500 of funding provided to the school in Bodo in 2008, we were able to make progress in four different areas. First, we have now more or less finished the third and final classroom building in Bodo. There are still a few small remaining items like window and door frames but the roof, cement floor and outer shell of the building are all finished and the entire space is now functional and usable. Second, in response to some of the insecurity, instability and increased crime in the larger Niger Delta region, we built a cement wall around the school's property. This wall also serves the important purpose of separating the school's property and pupils from the nearby Bodo-Bonny Island expressway which will bring a significant increase in vehicular traffic to the area whenever it finally opens. While the school might build this wall a bit higher in coming years, its property is now well demarcated from the surrounding community. Third, and most personally satisfying, we have more or less finished building boys, girls and teachers' latrines at the school in Bodo. The building housing the latrines and the waste pit which will ultimately collect the urine and feces are finished. We have also purchased the pipes to connect the latrines to the waste pit and those pipes will be connected any day now. Finally, in response to the massive 2008 oil spill in Bodo, I decided to provide \$500 in funding to the school's partners at the Center for Environment, Human Rights and Development to defray some of their expenses toward the commissioning of a report on how the oil spill has directly affected students at the school and their families. Much of that report has now been completed and I hope to have the final version of the report available for publication later this year.

In 2008, Reverend Moses, the school director in Bodo, used his discretion to make some changes in how our tuition fee scholarship funding was awarded to the poorest pupils at the school. Essentially, Rev. Moses decided to provide more comprehensive and hence more expensive scholarships to a smaller number of students with the greatest need. The more comprehensive scholarships included such things as school uniforms, textbooks and other supplies on top of the traditional tuition fee remission scholarships we have always offered. I fully supported the decision he made and am happy he felt confident enough to do so. This was a nice example of using our funding for the purposes originally specified but making slight adjustments to address changing or evolving local needs.

One thing we need to do a better job of in the future is regularize the overall amount and delivery dates of our scholarship funding. In past years, we have delivered as much scholarship funding as we had or thought we could afford either whenever I went to Nigeria or when we sent other rounds of funding. The schools have not always accounted for the use of the scholarship funding quickly so that has also sometimes introduced delays or interruptions into the funding process. My hope is that I can reach agreements with both school directors on the overall amount, month(s) of delivery and process for quickly accounting for the use of scholarship funds so that we can provide the schools with more consistent and predictable scholarship funding in the future.

Throughout 2008, we continued 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 I hope to visit their programs soon. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate them on the phenomenal success they have had in raising awareness of the problem of false accusations of child witchcraft in Akwa Ibom State and throughout Nigeria and sub-Saharan Africa more generally. In November 2008, the British network Channel 4 ran a documentary entitled “Saving Africa’s Witch Children” as part of its “Dispatches” series. This film, based largely on the work that Gary, Naomi, Stepping Stones and their local partners are doing to combat child witchcraft in Akwa Ibom State won a BAFTA award (the British equivalent of the Oscars) in April 2009. We are proud and honored to collaborate with Stepping Stones Nigeria and we hope to continue to expand our existing partnership in new directions, one of which you will see highlighted below.

There were two significant events in Bodo in 2008 that impacted the work we do there. First, in January 2008, a woman in the community named Gberedeela Rose-Zagah had two outboard engine boat motors stolen from her property by armed robbers. Ms. Rose-Zagah reported the theft first to the Bodo Council of Chiefs and then to the Joint Task Force (a special security task force in the Niger Delta). She also took the matter up directly with members of the Deebam cult group (the term “cult” in Nigeria is applied to groups we might otherwise call gangs or armed militias). Ultimately, the end result of this was a series of public meetings where approximately 70 cult members renounced violence and illicit activities in a traditional ceremony in front of the Bodo Council of Chiefs, police, army and local government officials and general community members. Although the situation in the larger Niger Delta was so unstable that I was asked not to come for a planned visit in February 2008, this ceremony did have some positive effect on the security situation in Bodo. While things remain fragile, the larger Niger Delta security situation has somewhat improved from the depths it plumbed in 2007 and 2008 and I am very optimistic that I will be able to return to visit the schools again later this summer.

As I did in last year’s annual report, let me again emphasize here that our schools are by no means targets of the 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.

Second, as mentioned briefly above, a devastating oil spill struck Bodo in the late summer and fall of 2008. The oil spill apparently started when the 28 inch Bomu-Bonny pipeline operated by the Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria ruptured on August 28, 2008. The oil spill substantively affected the Bodo riverfront, including a number of areas that had still not recovered fully from a previous oil spill in 2003. According to the October 2008 report *Persistent Oil Spillage at Bodo Creek*, issued by the Center for Environment, Human Rights and Democracy (available via <http://www.cehrd.org>) “Given the overwhelming

dependency of Gokana people's livelihood on mangrove and artisanal fisheries, it is safe to infer that the spillage will largely undermine food security in the locality. Most importantly, nearly two months have passed since the oil spill started and oil is still gushing from the impaired pipeline." A subsequent CEHRD report, *Scorecard for 2008*, quotes a Bodo fisherman named Samuel Nadu as saying "Since late August, we started noticing the oil destroying our river which killed all the fishes, all the periwinkles, all the crabs. If you enter the mangrove forests everywhere is smelling of crude oil; if you want to go fishing you have to paddle for about four hours through several rivers before you can get to where you can catch fish and the spill is lesser, but some of the fishes we catch when you open the stomach, it smells of crude oil. I don't have farmland. It is fishing I do and my family and a lot of people of this village depend on fishing for survival" (p. 157). The oil spill has obviously had serious negative effects on both the quality of drinking water for many people in the community and the quantity and quality of the protein they traditionally get in their diet from eating fish. We will continue to provide additional information on the impact of the oil spill as and when it becomes available.

To conclude on a more optimistic note, let me note that we are now at a tremendously exciting time in the history of this project. We have now largely completed the final classroom buildings in both Bane and Bodo. At this time, we have actively transited into a water and sanitation phase in Bodo and we have plans to do so shortly in Bane. We have already more or less finished latrines in Bodo and, as this is written, we are beginning construction on a borehole to provide drinking water for the school with an external tap that members of the Bodo community will be able to access freely at certain times of the day. The entire borehole project is being generously funded by our partners at Stepping Stones Nigeria and we are grateful for their fantastic support here. At the moment, I am not 100% certain how high the quality level of the water from the borehole will be (it will obviously be an improvement on river or stream water, but I don't know by how much). I initially thought we would ultimately need to also provide some sort of water filtration system to ensure cleaner and safer drinking water for the kids at the school. Gary Foxcroft from Stepping Stones, however, has told me that the water from their borehole is quite clean and he drinks from it regularly when he is in Nigeria. If we achieve similar quality levels in Bodo, we would not need to continue with water filtration later. Whatever the case in that regard, we should begin working on a similar water and sanitation plan in Bane later this year.

Outside of the water and sanitation phase of the project, we also hope to continue to provide and hopefully expand and improve the number of scholarships for the poorest and most vulnerable children at both schools. One additional project we hope to provide some matching funds for is the construction of a permanent home for the Tijen Pegg Mothers' Association and their sewing machine workshop. In the absence of a permanent home, the sewing machines have sometimes been used in the assembly hall of the school's final classroom building. Mixing sewing machines and primary education was certainly not our original intention and it is by no means best practice. Because the sewing machines are meant to generate income for the mothers, we will insist on significant cost sharing in the construction of this permanent home for the Mothers' Association. Our funding will supplement their contributions but not replace them. Beyond water, sanitation, scholarships and a permanent home for the sewing machine workshop, there are a number of other projects we would like to undertake in the future such as providing

better teacher training, supplying new equipment for the school's band or creating additional income-generating opportunities, but those are our most pressing immediate goals.

We can only move forward with this project by remaining humble, sincere, honest and accountable in our service to some of the poorest people on the planet. We will also continue to 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, David Serrins, Andrew Nelson, Kerry Hanson, Accurate Image, Nicole Collins, Patrick Naagbantou, Zabbey Nenibarini and the Center for the Environment, Human Rights and Development, all of whom absorbed costs and/or donated services free of charge in 2008 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 commitment make everything we do possible. Ultimately, everything we do with this project succeeds or fails on the strengths of their efforts working in the local villages. Second, to you, our international donors, who have chosen to support this small-scale and often slow moving grassroots development project to bring primary education to children in the rural Niger Delta. It is hard to convey the depth of my appreciation for your confidence and vision in supporting this micro-scale project in such a difficult and challenging environment as the Niger Delta. We are particularly grateful for your continued generous support during the recent economic downturn. Partly because our needs are small and our administrative costs non-existent and partly because we have demonstrated a track record of providing value for your charitable dollar, we have not so far been hit badly by the economic downturn. While we don't anticipate setting any fundraising records in 2009, we should be able to continue our operations as we have in past years. Regardless of how long the current economic climate lasts, we will do everything we can to maintain your trust and confidence in the coming years.

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

Thanks,

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