

## **International Friends Committee of Bebor Model Nursery/Primary School**

### **2009 Annual Report**

May 18, 2010

“Idealists, activists, development workers of the world, you have nothing to lose but your utopian chains.... You don’t have to immediately eliminate world poverty, bring world peace, or save the environment. You just have to do whatever you discover works with your modest resources to make a difference in the lives of poor people.” – William Easterly, *The White Man’s Burden: Why the West’s Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good*, pp. 29-30.

“Well, Bebor in the Ogoni heartland community of... Bodo... now has latrine facilities compared to children of the elites in urban centers. It is a thing of great pride... that kids whose parents/guardians would not have been able to procure things of this nature had the privilege of enjoying standardized and sophisticated modern latrine facilities. I think this is God in action.” – Rev. Moses Nyimale Lezor, school director, in a thank you letter to donors, October 1, 2009.

This is the eighth 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.

2009 can easily be summarized as our year of water and sanitation. As we have largely completed construction on the classroom buildings for each school (albeit we will need to re-roof some of the buildings with rust-proof roofs in the future), this was the year that we were able decisively to shift toward implementing our long-held ambitions to provide the schools with better quality drinking water and greatly improved sanitation facilities. Thanks to the incredible generosity of our friends at Stepping Stones Nigeria, we were able to install boreholes for drinking water at both schools in 2009. With our own funds, we were able to finish previously started work on boys, girls, and teachers’ toilets at the school in Bodo as well as a shower facility there if any of the younger kids have accidents or need to be cleaned up. The water provided by the borehole is what flushes the toilets and comes out of the sinks and shower at the school in Bodo. Thus, in 2009, we were able to achieve three quarters of our main water and sanitation goals. The only project that remains yet to be completed is providing boys, girls and teachers’ toilets at the school in Bane. As we sent funding for that last month, we should be able to document that being completed in our next annual report.

In terms of numbers, in three separate funding rounds in April 2009, July 2009, and October 2009, we were able to provide the schools with \$20,100 of funding. Of this, \$12,100 in funding was provided by our partners at Stepping Stones Nigeria to install boreholes for improved drinking water at both schools (Bane and Bodo). Depending on how you look at it, either this collective \$20,100 figure is significantly up on the \$12,500 we provided in 2008 or the \$8,000 provided by the International Friends Committee on its own is down from the \$11,400 of annual funding we had averaged over the previous five years. However you choose to look at it, I felt it was incumbent to accept the funding from Stepping Stones Nigeria with sincere gratitude

and prioritize the projects they were willing to fund in 2009. By the end of 2009, we had collectively provided BMN/PS with \$92,600 worth of funding.

In addition to the boreholes and latrines described above, we did four other things with the funding provided in 2009. First, we provided \$3,000 in tuition fee scholarship funding divided evenly between the two schools (an increase over the \$2,000 we provided in late 2007). In what I hope will be a lasting permanent improvement, we also agreed that half of this money would be provided to each school in September with the other half provided to each school in January. Hopefully this will regularize and institutionalize our scholarship funding procedures so the respective school directors can make better long-term plans in this regard.

Second, we provided approximately \$3,333 to start construction on a permanent home for the Tijen Pegg Mothers' Association and their sewing machine workshop in Bodo. As many of you know, thanks to generous support from the Timmy Foundation we were able to purchase 30 sewing machines for the mothers in 2006. The women did not, however, have a permanent home for the sewing machine workshop which frequently resulted in them using the school's assembly hall room for their sewing. Obviously, this was not best practice either for classroom space utilization or for the long-term stability of this women's economic development initiative. It will take time to complete the permanent facility but we at least started down this path in 2009.

Third, we were able to provide approximately \$667 of funding to each school to purchase drums and other musical equipment for their respective parade bands. In Bodo, the parade band is called the Pat and Gerry Neils Memorial Band in honor of my late aunt and uncle who were early and keen supporters of the schools. In Bane, the parade band is called the Jim Wark Half Century Band. That name comes from the fact that this funding was provided by Mary Wark in honor of her husband Jim's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. Let me quote to you from a letter that Leelee Wiwa Tanen, the school director in Bane, wrote about how significant the establishment of the Jim Wark Half Century Band was to their school. In December 2009, Leelee wrote "May we inform you that your gesture has taken no time to have positive impact on us. For instance, a day after we received them, the pupils in demonstration of their undisguised appreciation, took a march around the community playing these drums anywhere they went. Guess what! It was a surprise to see that the sound of the drum could force an unprecedented, unexpected and unimaginable crowd to follow us wherever we went. Suffice it to say that since then, we have been the talk of the town. You have confirmed us as an international institution of learning. More and more children are coming to enroll in the school."

Fourth, for approximately \$333, we were able to commission a study on the quality of the water produced by the new borehole at the school in Bodo. The study took water samples from three different locations in Bodo – the school's new borehole, its previous well water and a river commonly used for drinking water and then analyzed the samples at the University of Port Harcourt to measure the levels of eight chemical and five microbiological parameters that are important determinants of the overall quality of drinking water. Not surprisingly, the report found that the borehole had led to significant improvements in water quality across a number of these dimensions. The entire report is posted in the documents and reports section of the <http://www.bebor.org> website if you would like to see it. I hope we are able to do more such detailed evaluations in the future.

By far and away the biggest personal highlight for me was the chance to return to Nigeria for a seventh visit to see the schools in July 2009. As some of you know, I had originally planned to visit Nigeria in February 2008 but was asked not to come then because of all the kidnapping, crime and political instability in the Niger Delta at that time. I'm pleased to report that things have calmed down and improved on the security front. My trip in 2009 was not much different than any of the other previous visits I have made to the Niger Delta. I wanted to go by myself this year to ascertain how similar or different things were before inviting any of you to join me in the future. Now that I have done so, and assuming things do not change for the worse, I hope a few more of you will be able to come with me on future trips to see the schools.

One of the real big highlights of the trip this year for me was meeting a group of the "Bebor ambassadors" in Bodo. This is essentially what we would call an alumni association of kids who have now graduated from the nursery and primary school and gone on to various secondary schools in the area. All of these kids are doing well in their respective secondary schools and many of them have ambitious dreams for attending university and moving into professional careers. Whether or not those dreams will ultimately be realized is, of course, something beyond our control. It was incredibly encouraging, though, to see how thankful and appreciative these students were for the comparatively great start they got at Bebor and how ambitious they were for the future. Various photos from my trip are scattered throughout the school's webpage.

In previous annual reports, I have highlighted some of the people who make the work we do possible. Many of you have heard me talk at length about the tremendous support and visionary leadership we have received from people like Reverend Moses, the school director in Bodo, and Patrick Naagbantou, the chairman of the school's board of directors. In this annual report, I would like to highlight two other individuals who had a phenomenal impact on our success in 2009. First, Gary Foxcroft, the executive director of Stepping Stones Nigeria, who provided the funding for the two boreholes we installed in 2009. Gary has been an incredible human rights campaigner against the evils of child witchcraft accusations in neighboring Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria and his work was documented in the film "Saving Africa's Witch Children" which will make its US debut later this month on HBO. The film generated so much publicity in Britain that Stepping Stones dramatically expanded its donor base and, correspondingly, stepped up its support for our schools to new levels. Thanks so much Gary for bringing forward the time we were able to provide safe drinking water for the schools. Second, Zabbey Nenibarini, the head of the conservation program at the Center for the Environment, Human Rights and Development, conducted the study on the borehole's water quality described above and provided all sorts of local expertise to enable us to move forward with the installation of the boreholes and latrines. Zabbey is a trained marine biologist and his expertise was instrumental in achieving what we did with water and sanitation in 2009. The combination of Gary's funding and Zabbey's specialized knowledge was incredibly powerful for the schools in 2009.

As I noted in last year's annual report, beyond the water and sanitation phase of the project, we also plan to continue to provide and hopefully expand and improve the number of scholarships for the poorest and most vulnerable children at both schools. We should make good progress toward completing the permanent home for the Tijen Pegg Mothers' Association and their sewing machine workshop in 2010. 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. We will probably also start re-roofing some of the original buildings in Bodo that are now starting to rust through. Beyond water, sanitation, scholarships, rust-proof roofs 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, potentially building a secondary school in Bodo 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. Throughout 2009, we were able to continue absorbing administrative and organizational costs in other ways so that 100% of your donations actually reached the schools in Nigeria. In addition to absorbing a number of costs myself, we are grateful to our partners at the Timmy Foundation, David Serrins, Andrew Nelson, Kerry Hanson, Accurate Image, 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 2009.

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. However much we try to help, this entire project ultimately 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 tiny and often slow moving grassroots development project to bring primary education to children in the rural Niger Delta. It is difficult to convey the depth of my appreciation for your vision and persistence in supporting this micro-scale project in such an arduous environment as the Niger Delta. Thanks both to your continuing support throughout the economic downturn and to our minimal cost structure, unlike many other charities, we were able to continue our operations without any cutbacks in 2009 and we plan to do so again in 2010.

The two quotes at the start of this annual report indicate just how important your support remains to this project. William Easterly, a harsh critic of many official foreign aid efforts, reminds us that we can't let our failure to end global poverty detract from the many things we actually can do to help the world's poorest. The quote from Reverend Moses shows just how significant one of those very small-scale interventions, building latrines, can be for the beneficiaries. This project has been doing things like that by bundling \$50 and \$100 and \$250 and \$500 and \$1,000 donations together for almost exactly a decade now. Needless to say, we will do everything we can to maintain your trust and confidence in the coming years so we can continue doing such things for the beautiful children in the villages we serve in the rural Niger Delta.

If you have any questions or need more information, please don't hesitate to get in touch with me via [smpegg@iupui.edu](mailto: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