

International Friends Committee of Bebor Model Nursery/Primary Schools

2020 Annual Report

July 8, 2021

“School feeding programs have often been shut down along with schools.” – from Nicholas Kristof, “This Pandemic Is Bringing Another with It,” *New York Times*, 4/22/20.

“Inflation is exacerbating poverty.... in 2020 food prices accounted for 63 percent of the total increase in inflation. Most of the food that households consume is purchased rather than self-produced, even among poor agricultural households in rural areas; food-price inflation is thus a major threat to purchasing power and household welfare.... food insecurity continues to be more prevalent than it was before the pandemic struck: in November 2020, adults in 56.1 percent of households had skipped meals in the previous 30 days and 48.0 percent of households ran out of food entirely.” – from World Bank, *Nigeria Development Update June 2021*, pp. 3 and 46.

This is the eighteenth in a series of annual or bi-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 <https://www.bebor.org/> website.

As it was for everyone else around the world, 2020 was defined for us by the COVID-19 pandemic. We were prevented from doing some things that we wanted to do because Rivers State, Nigeria shut all schools down on March 23, 2020. We made an unusual decision to divert resources from one use to another use because of the pandemic. We also took somewhat of a risk in expanding our nutrition program to address the rapid increase in food insecurity and child malnutrition brought on by the pandemic. In the face of all the challenges and disruptions the pandemic presented us with, I cannot put into words how grateful I am for the continued and, in many cases, increased generosity shown by our supporters that enabled us to continue functioning at a sustained high level throughout 2020 and enter 2021 in reasonably good shape. Thank you so much.

In terms of numbers, we sent \$25,750 in four separate rounds of funding to our schools in 2020. This eclipses our previous annual record of \$23,950 of funding sent in 2013. It is also significantly higher than the \$14,721 of annual funding we sent the schools on average from 2010 – 2019. By the end of 2020, the International Friends Committee and [Timmy Global Health](#) had provided BMN/PS with \$253,455 worth of funding. Including just the water-related contributions of our partners at Safe Child Africa which funded boreholes for drinking water at our schools in Bane and Bodo brings this figure to \$265,555.

As noted previously for the past several years, our funding numbers go up and down every year. As has always been the case with this project, we are not obsessed with dollars of output. Please do not get too excited that we had a great year in 2020 and please don’t worry too much if 2021 or 2022 is down in comparison to 2020. Such fluctuations are inevitable with a micro-scale project like this, and they are not necessarily a great measure of its overall health or success.

As I also noted in our last four annual reports, our funding portfolio has shifted over time from providing infrastructure (classroom buildings, boreholes, toilets) that enables the children we serve to attend schools with decent facilities to investing more directly in the children themselves, principally through our health, nutrition and scholarship programs. We transitioned from 70% infrastructure funding in 2015 to 90% health and nutrition funding in 2016. In 2019, our funding profile was approximately 42.83% for our nutrition program, 18.95% for our health program, 8.36% for infrastructure and 29.86% for scholarship funding. In 2020, due to some pandemic-induced changes discussed below, our funding profile was approximately 68.15% for our expanded nutrition program, either 20.19% for our health program or 12.43% for our health program + 7.77% for infrastructure (if you count constructing and equipping a sickbay at one school as infrastructure rather than health) and 11.65% for scholarship funding. We do not try to hit a specific percent of funding devoted to health, nutrition, infrastructure, scholarships or anything else. These figures have shifted over time, and they will continue to shift as we respond to specific needs at our schools or requests from them. Certainly, the COVID-19 pandemic shifted these figures for 2020 in ways that might not persist in the future. In general, though, I think the broad pattern of less investment in physical infrastructure and more investment directly in the health and well-being of the children we serve is likely to be a longer-term trend for our work in the rural areas of Rivers State, Nigeria. The one major potential exception to this will be if we can help Our Lady's Nursery and Primary School in K-Dere get into better facilities at some point soon. Their existing infrastructure is obviously inadequate and the children there are in worse conditions than the children at any of the other five schools we serve. Before improving their facilities, though, they first need to secure land in K-Dere where such improved facilities could be built.

In reporting on the funds we provided to the schools in 2020, let me break it down into three main categories. First, we provided \$5,200 in funding to our health program. \$2,000 of this funding was to construct and equip a sickbay at St. Bernard's Nursery and Primary School in Biara, Rivers State, Nigeria. This now brings us up to five sickbays with the only school not having one being Our Lady's Nursery and Primary School in K-Dere (because they do not yet have permanent facilities that could host a sickbay). \$3,200 was for our health program in the Fall 2020 semester. Our health program now covers all six schools that we support and the more than 1,450 pupils at those schools. It currently features four main components: 1) public health education for the children, parents and teachers; 2) sickbays at five of the six schools we supported in 2020 which are stocked with some basic first aid materials and Nigeria-specific supplies like anti-malarial medication and oral rehydration salts; 3) providing basic vaccines and immunizations including measles, polio, tetanus, typhoid, Vitamin A supplements and yellow fever for the older children; 4) deworming treatment by providing the children twice a year with chewable 400 mg tablets of Albendazole which keep them worm-free throughout the year. In 2020, all four elements of our health program were carried out by local Nigerian doctors and nurses at all six schools we serve after schools reopened in Rivers State on November 16, 2020.

Second, we provided \$17,550 of funding (including \$2,400 diverted from our health program because we were unable to use it in Spring 2020) to continue our nutrition program in Bodo and to expand it after the pandemic-induced shutdown of schools to Our Lady's Nursery and Primary School in K-Dere and St. Bernard's Nursery and Primary School in Biara. These schools were selected for two main reasons. First, they are both in close geographic proximity to Bodo where our nutrition program started in 2017 (Bane and Bori are further out) which meant the same staff could prepare the same food in the same location with minimal additional

transportation costs to these schools. Second, they have relatively smaller student populations than St. Patrick's Nursery and Primary School in Bodo which scores well in terms of geographic proximity but has nearly 600 pupils which would have been far too large a burden for our limited resources to address. We made the decision to keep our nutrition program running at our original school in Bodo as schools were being shut down in March 2020. This was done after meetings with the parents of the children enrolled in the program who indicated both their fervent desire that we keep the program running and their willingness to bring their children to the school to enable us to do that. Previously, our nutrition program in Bodo crammed all the kids into one large room so other classrooms could be used for other purposes. This obviously would not work with the need for social distancing so we spread the children out across multiple different now closed classrooms to ensure that we could maintain physical distancing while feeding them. Dr. Nabie Nubari Francis, our health and nutrition program coordinator and I wrote this experience up and published it as an academic journal article which has now been cited several times.¹ As pandemic-induced malnutrition and food insecurity worsened dramatically throughout April 2020, we took the bold and somewhat risky decision to expand our nutrition program to support our schools in Biara and K-Dere in May 2020. This was done only after consultation with several long-term, important and intellectually engaged supporters, most of whom supported the decision, several of whom asked great questions about it that helped clarify the decision for me and many of whom made additional generous contributions to enable it to happen. The quotes at the beginning of this report provide some justification for our decision to expand the nutrition program in May 2020.

The funding we sent for the nutrition program in August 2020 ensured its continued operation at these three schools (Biara, Bodo, K-Dere) through February 2021 and we currently have the nutrition program funded at these three schools through the end of August 2021. As noted previously, the nutrition program features Ogi Soy Plus which was developed by a local Nigerian food scientist. Ogi Soy Plus is based on three main ingredients: crayfish, millet, and soybeans (every 1 kilogram of Ogi Soy Plus comprises 0.5 kg of soybeans, 0.3 kg of crayfish and 0.2 kg of millet). All three of these ingredients are available locally. Assuming funding allows, we hope to at least maintain the nutrition program at the three schools it currently serves, but we might have to cut it back at some point if we are unable to raise sufficient funds to maintain this level of support. In an ideal world, we would love to expand the nutrition program to additional schools as or when funding allows.

Third, we provided \$3,000 in scholarship funding to all six of our schools to coincide with the reopening of schools in Rivers State on November 16, 2020. We had originally planned to send scholarship funding in April 2020 for the spring semester, but that funding was not sent due to the pandemic-induced shutdown of all schools. Our \$3,000 of scholarship funding was divided into the following increments: \$750 for our original school in Bodo, \$500 each for our schools in Bane and Bori and for St. Patrick's in Bodo and \$375 each for St. Bernard's in Biara and Our Lady's in K-Dere. I do not have an age or gender breakdown to report, but this \$3,000 of scholarship funding provided scholarships to 192 pupils in total with a breakdown of 70 at our original school in Bodo, 21 in Biara, 31 in K-Dere, 25 in Bane, 25 in Bori and 20 at St. Patrick's. The reason the numbers vary so much is some school directors provide smaller scholarships (say, tuition fees or partial tuition fees only) to a larger number of students while others provide more

¹ Francis, Nabie Nubari and Scott Pegg. "Socially Distanced School-Based Nutrition Program Under COVID 19 in the Rural Niger Delta," *Extractive Industries and Society*, Vol. 7, No. 2, April 2020, pp. 576-579.

generous scholarships (including, say, school uniforms, books and supplies) to a smaller number of students. We allow them to use their individual discretion in making those decisions. We already sent a similar amount of scholarship funding to these schools for the Spring 2021 semester and hope to continue broadly similar levels of scholarship funding throughout 2021.

In 2020 (see previous annual reports for earlier figures), we contributed \$2,115.38 to our partners at [Timmy Global Health](#) as part of the 7% administrative fee they instituted on their programs in June 2010. Given the numerous services that Timmy provides to us, I believe this is a fair charge to help ensure their longer-term viability as an organization. Aside from this, Timmy Global Health has also generously provided far more support to our work in Nigeria than we have contributed to them as administrative fees and we remain grateful for that support. As noted previously, we will continue to do everything we can to ensure that the other 93% of your donations go directly to our schools in Nigeria. I personally absorb costs like postage to mail thank you letters or having our website hosted and our local Nigerian partners at CEHRD also provide several free services and absorb many costs themselves. Anyone who travels to Nigeria to visit the schools, myself included, will continue to pay all their own costs out of pocket with no support coming from donated funds.

If you have not already done so, please like Bebor's [Facebook page](#) and its [Instagram page](#). Both places are good sources for brief and contemporary updates on the work we are doing. Thanks to cellphones and WhatsApp, I'm now sometimes able to post same-day photos from our nutrition program feedings or health program visits. A lot of stuff gets shared on Bebor's Facebook and Instagram pages before it makes it onto the [school's website](#) or into one of these annual reports so try to follow them if you can.

Looking to the future, we have an exciting new scholarship initiative for students with disabilities that just started in April 2021 and which I will share more about in our 2021 annual report. As we have always done, we will maintain our existing physical infrastructure including classroom buildings, water, and sanitation at our schools in Bane, Bodo and Bori and address any problems that might arise with any of the buildings or facilities at any of the six schools we support. At some point in the future, we would very much like to improve the physical infrastructure at Our Lady's Nursery and Primary School in K-Dere which currently lags far behind the other five schools we serve. We plan to continue our health programming at all six schools (Bane, Bodo, Bori, St. Patrick's, Our Lady's, and St. Bernard's) and we sincerely hope to maintain our nutrition program at the three schools it currently serves and expand it to additional schools if we can. Other opportunities or challenges might arise but continuing to sustain our health and nutrition programs remains our most immediate short-term objective.

We extend our gratitude to Dr. Nabie Nubari Francis, our health and nutrition program coordinator, Dr. Nenibarini Zabbey, the coordinator of CEHRD, and all our other Nigerian partners including Reverend Moses Nyimale Lezor, Leelee Wiwa Tanen, Dr. Owens Wiwa, Father Anthony Bakel, Father Denis Asomugha and Father Dennis Sibeate. In addition to our Nigerian partners, we remain profoundly grateful to Dr. Chuck Dietzen, Melissa Dulaney, Emely Sanchez Baez and all our domestic partners at Timmy Global Health. We also remain tremendously indebted to you, our international donors, who continue to support this micro-scale development project that strives to bring the benefits of primary education and basic healthcare and nutrition to more than 1,400 children every year in the rural Niger Delta. While so many other charities and philanthropic initiatives struggled significantly or collapsed in 2020 due to the

pandemic, so many of you recognized the dramatically increased needs in Nigeria that our donations were almost a third higher than they were in 2019. I am humbled by your support and your continued vote of confidence in the work that we do in Rivers State, Nigeria. We always remain focused on using our limited funds wisely and generating tangible results that directly benefit the students we serve, and which demonstrate to you that your donations are having real and positive impacts. We simply could not do anything described in this annual report without your support.

If you have any questions or need more information, please don't hesitate to get in touch with me via smpegg@iupui.edu or (+1) 317-361-8329. As always, thank you so much for your past, present and hopefully continued future support of this project.

Thanks,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Scott Pegg".

Scott Pegg,

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