

Village Volunteers in action!

Supporting Lambassa¹ ICA Benin

Like so many stories, this one started with an e-mail. In September 2007 Kassimou Issotina, the Director of Lambassa, wrote “we have planned to hold a training session for our new members and students who will serve us as volunteers on several projects. But our organization is not able to support all its costs. That's why I am writing to you to know if ICA UK can assist us for this.” We needed to know more, but even this two-line message was sufficient to indicate that there was an identified need, that it was important for the organisation and that they would have difficulty in doing it without external support. Over the coming weeks, we worked with Kassimou to build up a more formal proposal for the training, including the justification, the objectives and, of course, a budget.



Kassimou Issotina, Director of ICA Benin. Kassimou has led ICA Benin since its inception in 2003.

Since the foundation of of Lambassa ICA Benin in 2003, building up the capacity of their staff and volunteers to train and facilitate had been a priority. To this end, one of their members participated in the International TOP Training programme organized by ICA USA in 2005 but unfortunately he died one year later. Further, in December 2005 a ToP training session was organized by ICA Benin, in which some of their staff and volunteers were trained by Marie-Noelle Houzeau of ICA Associates (Canada). Many of those trained, however, subsequently left the organisation due to insufficient funding for projects.

By mid-2007 the situation had changed. ICA Benin was in a stronger position, with confirmed activities such as facilitating a Legal Empowerment Conference, running a consultation on water and sanitation in Cotonou and Djougou (with funding from the World Bank), and a commitment to work over several years with grassroots communities in five regions of Benin (Collines, Donga, Atacora, Borgou and Alibori). These programmes would be focusing on access to justice, property rights, labour rights and business opportunities to the poor. The need for facilitators and trainers had re-emerged, and the response was to seek support for a training event.

¹ “Lambassa” is a Lokpa word meaning “do appreciable things.”

In October 2007 the ICA:UK Board agreed to support **ICA Benin** with £1,500 of Village Volunteers funds to support a training for their staff and volunteers in the ICA's participatory methods. Village Volunteer's funding was matched by a further £1,500 raised by ICA Benin. This event built on the earlier training conducted ICA Associates, and was designed to serve both a short term purpose of preparing facilitators for activities ICA Benin already has funding for, and a longer term purpose of developing a pool of trained staff and volunteers who can be called upon in future.



The training took place in two sessions in February and April 2008. It was attended by 32 people: Ten ICA Benin members, 2 Consultants, 5 Volunteers, 5 Teachers and 10 students. The trainers were two people who had been trained by ICA Associates in 2005: Padonou Antoine, a high level teacher and Alodji Honoré, a Programme Officer in the Ministry of Communication.

The training was well received: Kounkouaga Magloire, Vice-Headmaster of Copargo Secondary School, said, *"Before this training, I have participated to many others, but honestly, this one is very powerful"*, while Adamou Ibrahima, a teacher from Ouaké Secondary school, commented, *"Last year, I missed a job because I hadn't skills like these. Now, I am ready for such proposals"* and Yoto Josephine, a student, said *"Until now, pupils and students are not involved in leadership skills training*

activities in our region. Many thanks to ICA Benin and her partners for these efforts"

In addition to the training itself, practice sessions have been arranged for the participants to try out their new skills, and they are already contributing to the implementation of the HIV/AIDS project with schools in the region of Donga. They are also contributing in workshops as part of the consultation process with the Commission for the Legal Empowerment of the Poor, which, through consultation with communities in four regions of Benin, is assessing the key issues for poor communities in the arena of human rights.



In April 2009, one year after the training took place, we received another e-mail from Kassimou, noting the changes that have taken place:

All the participants have been listed as potential volunteers for our projects. Five volunteers are currently involved in our tree-planting campaign with grassroots communities, three others are working on our small project on HIV/AIDS in Ouaké district, and next month a project on land access for women will start which will require at least four persons.

We don't worry now when we need to start a project. After this training we noticed that communities' participation in our programmes is increasing because they understand better what we do.