

Public Private Partnership Empowers Youth

The on-going efforts of the Empowering Cocoa Households with Opportunities and Education Solutions, (ECHOES) program to promote a replicable and scalable model of relevant rural education for youth in West Africa have resulted in a number of positive outcomes. ECHOES, in partnership with the Africa Education Initiative (AEI), seeks to make education more relevant and to provide youth with the kinds of skills that will allow them to make a positive impact on the future of their communities. This not only more fully engages the students in the classroom, but also provides greater incentives for parents to send their children to school.

Comfort Cudjo is from Nkonya, a small village in the Wiawso district of the Western Region of Ghana. Comfort is 18 years old and the youngest of five children. Though her parents are cocoa farmers and live in Nkonya, Comfort had been living all her life in Accra with her elder sister. Comfort stopped schooling last year and returned back to her village when she became pregnant.

Until now, Comfort was a victim of teenage pregnancy.

She was no longer in school, and saw few future prospects for her and her child. “Before the ECHOES project, I felt my whole world was falling apart. Even my parents were not happy to see me. Ms. Nyantakyi, ECHOES field agent in Nkonya, started talking to my parents on the need

for them to support me to continue to Junior High School even though I have a child.” Through long-term dialogue and encouragement with both Comfort and her parents, Ms. Nyantakyi was able to convince them to allow her to re-enroll in the second year of Junior Secondary School. She now regularly participates in the student agriculture club and has joined a dance group, performing at her village’s Child Labor Day celebration.

“Ms. Nyantakyi has inspired me and I’m no more ashamed to go to school. My dream was to become a journalist and I hope I can achieve it with hard work. Not only that, but I will also be better off because the way I understand issues has changed. Through the ECHOES project I now know that there are people out there to guide me.” Comfort adds, “Now I know that child bearing should not stop a child from continuing her education. School children should be educated on teenage pregnancy.”

Her parents have also expressed delight in the changes they have seen in their daughter. “One of our major problems is solved. Comfort is going back to school. We can have a lady. We are happy and will support her by taking care of the baby,” states Mrs. Mercy Doku, Comfort’s mother. Comfort passed her grade level this year, and will be enrolling in the final level of Junior Secondary School at the start of the fall term.

ECHOES is a public private partnership between USAID’s Africa Education Initiative and the World Cocoa Foundation on behalf of its members: Kraft, Mars, Hershey’s, Fazer, Cloetta, Starbucks, Olam Int’l. Norwegian Association of Chocolate Manufacturers and ED&F Man Cocoa.



ECHOES

Comfort Cudjo in front of her house.

The Telly Awards



USAID’s Africa Education Initiative recently was honored during the 30th Annual Telly Awards with a Silver Telly for the video production, Readers are Leaders. The production highlighted how lives and policies have changed in some sub-Saharan African nations because of books through the Textbook and Learning Materials Program. The Telly Awards is the premier award honoring outstanding local, regional and cable television commercials and programs. The Telly receives over 13,000 entries annually from all 50 states and countries around the world. Readers are Leaders was produced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture production department.