

Mother-daughter team serve up success for school lunch

By Tony Ends
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Deeply rutted, up-and-down roads. Makeshift bridges of loose logs cross creek after creek. What World Food Programme shipments travel to rural Gueckedou schools, is incredible.

Just getting commodities – yellow lentils, rice, dried fish – to Gbandou School, for instance, is a success story. It keeps 164 primary students fed there in the Nongoa Sub Prefecture of Gueckedou.

Yet just one pair of women cook that food at Gbandou four days a week, every week of the school year. They add immeasurably to the United Nations WFP’s inspiring story.

Koumba Eveline Tolno walks with her “daughter” Tewa Sonna Leno and grandbabies about half-a-mile to prepare school lunch at Gbandou. Named for its village, Gbandou School actually serves seven villages from Guinea’s surrounding tropical countryside.

Distances primary school students walk through the occasional palm, banana and mango trees, the undulating landscape of forest remnants, varies. Some must hike an hour to class each way.

Is it any wonder many parents abandon the responsibility, which ironically keeps their children from abandoning school?

Tolno and Leno receive no pay for cooking lunch for the entire school. WFP does not have resources anymore to compensate them with a few of the commodities, either. Humanitarian and development aid budgets the world over are being slashed and burned, like West African forests.

Yet Tolno is happy knowing that she’s cooking for her daughter and son attending the school, in addition to feeding all their classmates. Leno has a daughter attending in the primary grades, too.

Not having been able, either of them, to go to school themselves, Tolno and Leno also know how important school lunch is. School lunch helps children think, study, learn.

It keeps them in school throughout each day, so they don’t have to make that long walk twice. Tolno and Leno know that once home, in the heat of the day, the children, ages 6 to 13, simply wouldn’t return from lunch to the last half of classes.

“Student absenteeism has diminished with school lunch,” affirms Gbandou School Director Tamba Bangaly Koundouno. “There are a lot of girls in school now, too. The first in class this year is a girl at



Koumba Eveline Tolno and Tewa Sonna Leno bend on a March morning to the tasks that will feed dried yellow lentils and rice to hungry children at Gbandou School in Guinea’s Gueckedou Prefecture.

each level of our school.”

Back in the 2009-2010 school year, Gbandou School had 59 students enrolled, with 25 of them girls. Enrollment is up to 135, with 70 of the students now being girls. School lunch incentivizes families sending their girls, as well as boys, to school.

Over three arduous, 12-hour days in early March, I visited eight schools like Gbandou. As a UN field officer in partnership with the Peace Corps, I accompanied two other WFP staff to monitor and evaluate their school feeding programs.

As an organic vegetable crop grower of 25 years in Wisconsin, I also visited seven market gardens trying to increase local food production to their primary schools. A month earlier, I’d trained a non-governmental organization’s staff in solar food drying techniques to share with these gardens around Gueckedou, two hours’ drive south of where I led a market garden pilot project for the WFP.

With visits to the schools, we



Finda Sandouna naps in the shade while her mother Tewa Sonna Leno helps with World Food Programme school lunch preparations at Gbandou School in West Africa.

wanted to follow up on how the market gardens were using the solar food driers and training WFP provided.

To access the schools and gardens, our UN land cruiser driver had to stop repeatedly at the makeshift bridges to test the logs lodged in rock and sand for passage. I tried to picture larger vehicles laden with hundred-pound sacks of WFP commodities crossing those logs.

How West Africa’s drivers ev-

erywhere manage this, I just don’t know. A completely washed-out road barred our visit to a ninth school. Yet in every school we managed to reach, doors opened to the lunch program stores for us to inventory and check against bills of lading.

In my memory now of Gbandou, I see the hard-working hands of that pair of Guinean women, too. They complete the successful partnership with WFP and rural

schools.

I wonder if from the thatched coverings over where Tolno and Leno cook the school’s lunch, they can make out their own children’s voices. Can they hear them reciting in the classrooms so close by?

Children’s voices joyfully learning, thinking clearly, nourishing a brighter future thanks to a hot meal and a partnership of service to the world. It fed me just to see it even once.

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When

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% Dog Park

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Donations are to be utilized primarily for fencing, pet-scaping and other dog-park costs.

With the community’s help, the Brodhead Dog Park will be 100 percent pawssible.

Fiscal Facts: Lack of local choices may fuel low voter turnout

The lack of contested races for local government offices may be one reason why turnout for spring elections in Wisconsin is typically

much lower than in the fall. Voters who do not have a choice of candidates are not as likely to view the election as important or go to the polls.

There is no specific data source to reveal how many local races go uncontested statewide each spring, but surveys and anecdotal evidence indicate the number is substantial and increasing.

In a 2017 survey by Wisconsin Policy Forum researchers, officials in 52% of 188 cities and villages said they averaged zero to one candidate per seat over the past three years. Only 4% reported an average of two or more candidates per seat. The lack of competition for these

offices cuts across rural and urban communities. In municipalities with 15,000 or more residents, only 5% said contested races were the rule. Small communities reported about the same, with only 4% of seats regularly contested.

The trend appears to be getting worse. Among the municipal officials surveyed, 46% said that competition for governing boards has decreased over the past five to 10 years. Only 11% said competition had increased.

This information is a service of the Wisconsin Policy Forum, the state’s leading resource for non-partisan state and local government research and civic education.

April is Alcohol Awareness Month

In recognition of Alcohol Awareness month, Mayor Pinnow proclaimed April Underage Drinking Prevention month in the City of Brodhead. This official statement demonstrates the significance prevention plays in reducing underage drinking. As we approach prom and graduation season, youth will begin attending many social gatherings.

Please remember that alcohol consumed by anyone under the age of 21 years old is illegal. The new social host law in Wisconsin makes any adult who provides a

location for underage drinking subject to a \$500 fine.

To help remind parents and other adults about the legal consequences of hosting teen alcohol parties, Better Brodhead will be kicking off its Parents Who Host Lose the Most campaign. Yard signs, banners, window clings, and stickers with the familiar motto, Parents Who Host Lose the Most, are available by contacting Better Brodhead betterbrodhead@gmail.com. Thank you for supporting our community’s effort to prevent and reduce underage drinking.