The Dr. Serigne Tacko Kandji Award of Excellence

By: Daniel Fwanshishak, Education Coordinator, MVP Pampaida

The award is a follow up to the May visit of Dr. Serigne Tacko Kandji, the Regional Coordinator for Agriculture, to monitor activities in the Agriculture and Business Development Sector. Although not focused on Education directly, Dr. Kandji took time to discuss with the MVP Education Coordinator and gave valuable advice on how best to work with farmers and encourage them to support the education of their children. He advocated more community interaction and mobilisation and improved quality of education as ways to motivate and support education activities in the cluster.

He was around during the round-up activities of the Connect To Learn students excursion to Federal Government Girls College, Zaria and Ahmadu Bello Demonstration Secondary School where he met with the students in the Zaria Office of the MVP to encourage them on hard work and dedication to their studies. He took the students through his science background in college and Agricultural Engineering in university to his work with MVP.

Dr. Kandji concluded his “Career Talk” with a gracious personal donation towards instituting an award of excellence in the two schools for best students in each class. On behalf of the Team Leader, the students, their parents, and the MVP Education Coordinator thank Dr. Kandji for his encouragement and generosity.

He has already sent the prize money to be given to best female and male students across all the classes in Government Secondary School Saulawa and Government Secondary School Pampaida. As the students prepare for the exams in the coming weeks, they will also be competing to emerge as the lucky recipients of this great award.

Discussions on Koranic Schools in Senegal

By: Diptesh Paresh Soni, Education Intern, MVP Potou

The presence of numerous daaras, or Koranic schools, within the village cluster of Potou continues to pose a significant problem to achieving the MDG2. Despite significant efforts by the government of Senegal and various other partners the demand for a daara education, unrecognized by the state, often far outstrips the supply and capacity of public education.

At a recent educational forum in Louga, numerous governmental, non-governmental and community stakeholders came together in an attempt to synthesize interventions and actions moving forward. Representatives of the daaras seemed reticent to accept French as the official language of the Senegalese education system, but as Plan International and MVP have experienced, daaras were more amenable to the idea of teaching French when given due recognition and material support.

While the central government has been reticent to legitimize the daaras, the sheer demand for these schools has forced the reform of the education sector in recent years. Outside support from USAID, the Islamic Development Bank, and the World Bank is also progressively spurring change. More generally, the government and its partners understand that in a predominantly Muslim country, disenfranchising a large portion of the population based on faith is impossible, and that vigorous engagement is necessary.

The Potou team is working closely with the local government and community leaders to strengthen efforts for the upcoming enrollment season. Moreover, the CEWs are currently conducting a holistic survey of daaras within the MV1 cluster. The results will prove useful for understanding the role of daaras in Potou, and how the Project can work with these schools to provide a community-driven educational offering.
New hybrid sanitary pads to keep girls at school

By: Le Chen, Intern, MVP Mayange

Fifty girls in Mayange A school in Rwanda have been selected to participate in a new initiative called Be-Girl Pads, aimed at reducing the number of girls dropping out of school by addressing the challenge of menstrual management. Be-Girl Pads are part of a pilot programme started on the 7th of June this year, which introduces hybrid sanitary pads in Mayange Millennium Village as part of the project’s broader girls’ empowerment efforts.

Currently, over 20 percent of schoolgirls in Rwanda miss school, up to 50 days per year according to World Bank figures, due to the fact that sanitary pads are too expensive. Sanitary pads on the market cost over 500 Rwandan Francs per package, largely beyond the means of most people, particularly in rural areas where a subsistence, rather than cash-based economy is still the norm. Many girls feel too embarrassed to come to school without proper protection. Once a student misses too many days of class, it is difficult for them to catch up, and dropping out permanently from school is often the result.

The Be-Girl Pads pilot program addresses these issues by introducing reusable hybrid sanitary napkins which can be made cheaply with readily available materials. The nylon waterproof envelope can be filled with disposable toilet paper or reusable washable cloth. One pad kit includes two pads, allowing girls to have enough alternatives to change. Girls are also recommended to replace the filling cloth or toilet paper every three to four hours.

Consultation with girls and their parents prior to the start of the project revealed the challenges they face. Mukankuranga Josiane, mother of one participant in the pilot program, emphasized that before, one sanitary napkin for her daughter cost around 600 francs, which was unaffordable for her family.

Stereotyping and feelings of embarrassment among teenagers towards menstruation made the situation even worse. “When I used the cloth, it was so easy to fall down or misplace. I felt bad. I always have to ask for permission from teacher in order to change” Uwamahoro Janine, a 5th-grade girl in Mayange A school, said, with a bashful smile.

The hybrid pads are specially designed to address this discomfort and provide proper protection. The adjustable wings can secure and fix the cloth, to help girls stay protected. The first distribution of pads is free in the pilot period. The plan is then to move to local manufacture, with the added benefit of triggering the development of local small business in Mayange.

“The business potential of Be-Girl Pads is the main reason we choose this innovation. Presently, women who can do sewing in Mayange will be considered to weave the Be-Girl Pads, after all the materials are ready.” Donald Ndahiro, the Team Leader of Mayange Millennium Villages Project said.

Photo Caption: Jeanette Mukabalisa, the Community Development coordinator in Mayange Millennium Village Project, is having a discussion with the participants from 4th, 5th and 6th grades about their previous experiences in menstruation.

Photo Caption: Four steps to use the reusable Be-Girl Pads
Teaching in Action Workshop in Tanzania

By: Nemes Colman Temba, Education Coordinator, MVP Mbola

From 30 June to 6 July, seven teachers and the MVP Education Coordinator from MVP Mbola had an opportunity to participate in a Teaching in Action (TIA) workshop at Mwenge University College of Education (MWUCE) in the Moshi-Kilimanjaro region.

TIA is a teacher training program designed to promote the use of active, learner-centered teaching methods and critical thinking strategies among Tanzania’s secondary school students and teachers. It was developed in 2007 by MWUCE in collaboration with a visiting professor, Dr. Frances Vavrus from Teachers College Columbia University (NY - USA) with a grant from AfricAid, a non-governmental US organization.

The specific purpose of the workshop is to provide an opportunity for Tanzanian teachers to modify their teaching methods from techniques that involve rote memorization to the more participatory, critical, and learner-centered methods now required by the Tanzanian government.

Teachers were taught to employ use of the Learner Centered Teaching Techniques including:

- Building a Positive Learning Environment
- Engaging the Entire Class
- Tap into Multiple Intelligences
- Changing the Pace
- Every Minute Matters
- Check for Understanding

More importantly is for teachers to be aware of and consider the types of learners including visual, auditory and kinesthetic during both lessons preparations and lesson presentations.

The TIA is a three years program and will be conducted in three consecutive years (2013, 2014 and 2015). Participants were really impressed with the program and are eager to demonstrate the acquired skills in their respective working stations.

UN celebrates Malala Day on July 12

By: Angelique Mahal, Education Technical Advisor, New York

On July 12, 2013, Malala Yousafzai celebrated her 16th birthday delivering a speech on global education at the United Nations Youth Assembly at UN headquarters in New York. Shot in the head by the Taliban on her school bus on October 9, 2012 for widely promoting girls’ education, Malala has made an incredible medical recovery. Despite her tragic experience, Malala continues to fervently campaign with strength and determination for free and compulsory education for girls and boys worldwide. Malala stated, "we can’t all succeed when half of us are held back". She spoke of "the importance of pens and books and to not forget that millions of children are out of their schools". Malala ended her speech by calling for “let’s wage a global struggle against illiteracy, poverty, and terrorism. Let us pick up our books and our pens. They are our most powerful weapon. One child, one teacher, one book, and one pen can change the world. Education is the only solution. Education first”.

See and listen to Malala’s speech at http://tinyurl.com/Malala-Speech-at-UN
Stakeholder Meetings Aide Successful Exit Strategies

By: Diptesh Paresh Soni, Education Intern, MVP Potou

With just over two years left to achieve the MDGs, Millennium Village Project sites must now find sustainable exit strategies by working with numerous stakeholders, particularly governments, in order to ensure the proper functioning and necessary support for the villages in the absence of the Projects.

At a recent forum in Louga near the Potou site, government representatives from the national to the local level sat down with civil society members from MVP and Plan International to discuss low enrollment rates in the region, particularly regarding Koranic education. The two-day session served as valuable opportunity to draft action plans for the future, understand the mutual difficulties faced in respective sectors, and to synthesize the interventions of development partners for a greater impact on the target population.

"We organized this meeting to discuss the difficulties of implementing interventions among partners while trying to find solutions that can help to achieve a synergy of all these interventions," recalled Serigne Fall, Inspector of Inspection d’Academie (IA) Louga, charged with managing and monitoring education within the region under the direction of Mr. Lamine Sarr, head of IA.

The fact that the meetings were organized and conducted by local representatives ensured that the decisions made were reflective of the community’s needs. Moreover, it is likely that the coordination and organization by local representatives helped ensure the attendance and participation of many diverse and influential stakeholders. Head Imams sat amongst school directors, department heads, and project managers, exchanging potential solutions to critical regional challenges.

Convening such stakeholders in one place was useful for disseminating information: MVP and Plan were able to more articulately explain their interventions to those involved who could in turn ask further questions if needed. In such a way, the forum helped clarify the intentions of the project to other stakeholders and avoid any

Ateliers, or small group sessions, held on the second day proved useful for providing potential plans of action: pre-selected groups were given separate locations at which to read over documents listing further information on the challenges facing the sites and projects. They were asked to craft potential solutions, using the help of a moderator and a scribe, and those solutions were then announced and discussed in the larger open forum.

Following the forum, a Scientific Committee will draft a final action plan, which they will then disseminate and set about implementing within the region.

Overall, well-executed and community-driven stakeholder meetings serve as invaluable platforms for intervening partners to clearly explain their missions and work with local representatives to ensure the longevity of those interventions moving beyond 2015.