

## Togo Trip 2010 Recap and Thank You

As always, my first wish is that this note finds you and your family in good health. I am writing to share the highlights of the past three weeks that Rose and I spent with our cooperative in Togo. Before leaving for Togo, I imagined that I would have some days to rest since I spent a great deal of time in 2010 on the road. However, this hope was not realized, as instead we worked long hours. These hours were worthwhile, though, as this trip was a vivid reminder of why we have committed the past seven years to the empowerment of people in Togo and gave us courage to continue to do so. Furthermore, we were able to touch on new and ongoing projects and objectives, including:



### New Cooperative Members

Due to the positive sales last year, we were able to bring in an additional 15 members to our cooperative, of whom 10 are young women. Because of the extended family structure in Togo, this means that more than 60 individuals will be depending on their incomes. Our hope is to bring another 30 women to the cooperative before the end of the year.

### Solar Energy for the Cooperative

For the past seven years, we have planned to install a solar energy system at the cooperative but it was not possible, either financially or logistically, until this trip. During our first week, we installed a solar system to power lights and the



cooperatives laptop computer. The lights will make it easier for preparing the shea oil after dark. If this solar system works well for the cooperative, we will begin installing similar systems in poor schools in 2012. Over 90% of schools in rural Togo do not have access to electricity and lights. Installing simple solar systems will provide lighting during school and also after hours so students can meet and study.

### Water Treatment System



The byproduct of traditional shea production is a shea nut and water slurry. This byproduct is not waste; the water can be reused and the residue has multiple uses – for compost, biogas production and fuel. Previously, our byproduct treatment system was very labor intensive. Over the past two years, Rose designed a system to reduce labor and increase our ability to reuse the byproduct. During this visit, we were able to build and begin using the new system. The system is very simple – the byproduct is poured into a concrete holding tank each afternoon and allowed to settle overnight. In the mornings, the water is released and used to irrigate our lemongrass fields. The residue is scooped out and reused. Currently we are composting the bulk of the residue, but in the next month we will begin drying and compressing it into fuel logs.

### Construction of Nursery

Each year we plant 1,000 trees to mitigate the impact of climate change and desertification. This year we plan to increase the number to 4,000 trees. In order to realize this goal, the cooperative decided to build our own nursery and to hire an arborist. During our visit, we built the nursery shade structure, and our arborist has begun a three month training program with a local nursery expert. Next month, we will propagate 4,000 trees. After three months, the young trees will be transplanted throughout central Togo.



### Expansion of Maternal Health Program

Each year since 2006, we have provided maternal support for 100 pregnant women. For the 2010-2011 program, we decided to increase the number to 400 women. On this trip, we were able to visit most of the villages, and for the first time, established a binding agreement with the Togo government health system of the central region, the Sokodé PolyClinique, to provide full maternal support for 400 women. Alaffia pays all fees and expenses, and the clinics provide all needed medical needs – including regular checkups and emergency care. During our clinic tours, we were also able to visit with some of the women who participated in the program over the past four years. It was very gratifying to see healthy mothers and their children and to hear how the maternal health program has helped them.



### Distribution of Birthing Materials

In early 2010, we began a partnership with North Valley Family Medicine in Tonasket, WA. There is a serious lack of adequate birthing materials in Togolese clinics, which contributes to high maternal and baby death rates. Dr. Justina Bolz and her team in Tonasket set up a fundraiser for the Alaffia Maternal Health program. With the enticement of Alaffia products and helping their colleagues in Togo, Dr. Bolz raised enough funds to purchase birthing supplies for 700 births. The materials included basic supplies and equipment – such as gloves, gauze, towels, scalpels, scissors, and

clamps. We promised Dr. Bolz to personally deliver these materials to 7 village health clinics in Togo to ensure the goods were delivered to their intended recipients. Rose and I did just that – and the clinics were beyond pleased and grateful, as many of them still use scissors from the 1970s.



### Bicycles for Health



During our discussions with the Sokodé PolyClinique, we were asked if Alaffia could provide bicycles to local Village Health Agents. For all villages that do not have a health clinic, the central region clinic system provides a Village Health Agent. Village Health Agents visit households to conduct basic health checks, disseminate information about vaccination programs, healthy eating, malaria prevention and so forth, and provide basic first aid. However, they are not given any method of transportation, which makes their job very difficult to perform. We felt that this need aligns with our community empowerment

objectives; therefore, we decided to provide 100 bicycles to the program. There are 400 Village Health Agents in central Togo alone. We will follow this initiative very closely, and if they bicycles are truly used in the way the PolyClinique has agreed to, we will provide another 100 bicycles each year for the next three years. Furthermore, because of this additional need for bicycles, we will step up our collections from 500 to 1000 bikes this year. If you live in the Pacific Northwest and would like to donate a bicycle, please contact us.

## Alaffia Project Coordinator



Until recently, the Alaffia cooperative director also managed our community projects. As these projects have grown, it has become difficult for one person to manage both. For this reason, we hired Essi Azoumanah as our Alaffia Project Coordinator in Togo. Essi is a very unique and determined woman. She is 28 years old, and despite many hardships, has earned a Bachelor degree from the University of Benin in Togo. Essi's father died when she was just six years old, and she was raised by her mother. Since childhood, she decided she would become an important person one day, and that studying hard was her only option to achieve her goal. Essi's multi ethnic background also makes her perfect for the job. Essi's father was from southern Togo, and her mother is from the northern Kabyé ethnic group. She grew up and went to school in Sokodé. Because of her diverse background, Essi speaks 5 Togolese languages fluently, and has a great understanding of cultural differences and customs which is critical for the projects as they are conducted across multiple ethnicities.

Essi will help us conduct better follow-up on our projects – determining their impact and how best to use funding and resources.

## Kouloumi Secondary School

Schools like the secondary school at Kouloumi are the prime incentive for Alaffia's community projects. Alaffia's involvement in the Kouloumi school began in September 2008. At this time, I was visiting the cooperative, and a delegation made up of the Kouloumi Chief's representative and the new Kouloumi School Director visited me and urged Alaffia to provide benches for their new secondary school. Until 2008, Kouloumi, a town of over 5,000 inhabitants, did not have a secondary school. Students who wanted to continue beyond 6<sup>th</sup> grade either made the 15 km journey to the next larger town or moved in with relatives. In 2008, the government provided a teacher, and the villagers built the school – a basic mud and straw roofed structure, but could not afford benches. This is where Alaffia came in. I accepted the request and immediately put in an order for the benches to be built. In early 2009, the Director informed Alaffia that the village had given over 20 acres of land to the school and that they would like to participate in the reforestation project. After visiting the site, we agreed to their proposal and provided enough fruit and native trees to cover the school's property.

During this trip, we visited Kouloumi, and the first trees are now over 6 feet tall and will bear their first fruit this season. Kouloumi was chosen to participate in the Alaffia Bicycles for Education program, and we personally distributed 60 bicycles to the students that live in the surrounding smaller villages. The Kouloumi school has come a long way, and in recognition of Alaffia's help, they have named their girl



and boy soccer teams after Alaffia. After our visit, and seeing the determination of the community, the students, teachers, and the school's Director, Alaffia has decided to build a permanent 5-classroom structure for the school. Currently, the classrooms are constructed of mud and straw. From August to October, and then again in May and June, school is often cancelled because the roof cannot withstand the heavy rains. The school is located outside the village, and venomous snakes often enter the classrooms, even during school hours. The school also does not have a source of water, and the Director and teachers do not have an office. The total cost to provide a well and solid, well-built school for Kouloumi is \$9,000. Alaffia has pledged to finance and finish construction of the school by August 2011.





In summary, this trip was productive and provided us with a renewed belief that Alaffia community projects must continue at all costs and are worth all the long hours of work. It is also clear that these projects are only possible due to sales of Alaffia product, and whether you are an Alaffia rep, HABA Buyer, Wellness Department Manager, Merchandiser, Volunteer, Floor Staff, or Alaffia USA staff – your efforts reach beyond what you can imagine. On behalf of the Togolese communities and Alaffia cooperative members, I deeply thank you and wish all of you a healthy and peaceful 2011.

Please visit [www.alaffia.com](http://www.alaffia.com) or visit the Alaffia facebook page for more pictures from our trip. Also, please forward this recap to your stores and staff.

Once again, thank you for all of your support,

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