

WEST AFRICA

Children's Education Initiative >>>



Children study at a speed school in Bougouni, Mali, one of three operated by a Malian nongovernmental organization that will partner with Strømme Foundation in this Initiative.

Initiative Profile

Sector priority
Education

Year-one investment*
\$952,232
£480,791
€706,939

Duration
3 years

Lives to be impacted
67,170

* Conversions to non-U.S. currencies are based on rates in effect on Aug. 20, 2007. Actual purchase amounts will be determined by conversion rates in effect at the time of purchase.

Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso are three of the world's four least-developed nations. School attendance and literacy rates are low. Girls as young as 8 leave school to help with domestic chores and to care for their siblings. Boys drop out to grow and harvest crops and raise livestock. Many children never attend school because their families cannot afford fees or materials.

In this Initiative, Geneva Global will partner with Strømme Foundation, a Kristiansand, Norway-based relief and development organization, to give these children an education and put them on a path to lead productive lives. Strømme will operate speed schools that enable older children to catch up to a fourth- or fifth-grade academic level in eight months.

Education is one of the surest ways to improve life in West Africa. Without even a primary education, children are likely to remain impoverished for the rest of their lives. This Initiative will remove that hurdle for thousands of children, while helping their parents to see the importance of prioritizing education.

Helping unschooled children catch up with their peers

More than 3 million school-age children in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso are working instead of going to classes. In addition to facing a lifetime of poverty, uneducated children are vulnerable to being trafficked to neighboring countries, where they are forced into labor. But knowing how to read, write and do basic arithmetic empowers youth to make healthy, informed choices. Educated West African girls are less likely to be married before their teen years, undergo female genital mutilation, experience an unwanted pregnancy or contract HIV.

This Initiative will equip out-of-school children ages 8 to 12 to pass public-school entrance exams so they can continue their education. Community-based organizations train speed school teachers and provide them with materials and financial assistance, as well as hire experienced teachers qualified in math and science and familiar with local languages and French, the official language of the three countries.

West Africa

Population, population younger than 15

Mali – 13.1 million, 6.1 million
Niger – 13.5 million, 6.6 million
Burkina Faso – 12.8 million, 6 million

Population living on less than \$2 a day

Mali – female 12%, male 27%
Niger – female 9%, male 20%
Burkina Faso – female 8%, male 19%

Literacy (females 15 and older)

Mali – 91%
Niger – 85%
Burkina Faso – 72%

U.N. Human Development Index rank

Mali – 175 of 177 countries
Niger – 177 of 177 countries
Burkina Faso – 174 of 177 countries

Sources: World Bank, United Nations
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Why we recommend this Initiative

Since 2004, Strømme has used its speed schools – which emphasize equal access to education for girls and boys – to help adults and children gain an education in Mali. Students who completed such studies are encouraged to continue their education in public schools. Strømme has identified qualified community-based organizations in Mali to work with local children, but lacks the resources to reach additional kids.

Working with an experienced organization such as Strømme helps ensure the success of this Initiative. Strømme has a proven track record of working with community-based organizations in the design, implementation and evaluation of grass-roots education and microfinance projects. It has the capacity to expand its educational program to other regions of Mali, as well as parts of Niger and Burkina Faso. Local organizations and implementers will exchange ideas, share best practices and work together to provide quality education for the poorest of poor children.

This Initiative dovetails with another Initiative funded through Geneva Global in Mali and Burkina Faso, which focuses on helping women boost household income so they can afford to send children to school.

Changing lives

Astan Coulibaly, 12, of Domba, Mali, says, “I had not been able to go to school, because I was always busy helping my mother in her daily tasks. In fact, my parents could not afford the cost of normal education. I wanted to be able to read and write like the other children, but I had not had the chance. Then I finally saw a class full of women of my mother’s age learning to read and write [a result of funding from a Geneva Global client]. I decided to join. ... From the start, it was not very hard, and I was able to recognize the Bambara alphabet. I have improved quite rapidly. I can now read. I also hope to be able to write to my friends outside the village soon. I feel less isolated now and I hope in the future to open my own telecommunication center.”

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