

CAMEROON: THREE NEW CLASSES IN MBALE GOVERNMENT SCHOOL
THANKS TO A MTN-UNICEF PARTNERSHIP

Mbalè, 09 September- At ten o'clock in the morning, animation in the small village of Mbalè situated 600 Km from Yaoundé, was at its climax. Cultural groups were thrilling in the school yard. Two days after the kick-off of the 2008-2009 school year in Cameroon, this small village was preparing for the arrival of Ms Haman Adama, the first Minister of Basic Education to ever visit the area. She was coming there for the handing over ceremony of the renovated classrooms of the school in the village.



The old Mbalè Government Primary School

The Minister of Basic Education was accompanied in this ceremony by a representative of the Mobile Telephone Network (MTN) Foundation and a representative of UNICEF. They were welcomed by a large crowd made up of villagers, school children and traditional authorities led by their village chief (the lamido). All assembled in the school yard and were jubilating in front of the rehabilitated school buildings. In a very friendly ceremony, the MTN and UNICEF representatives handed over the keys of the newly built classrooms to the Minister.

Speaking on behalf of Ms Ora Musu Clemens, the UNICEF Representative in Cameroon, Dr Marcel Ouattara, Chief of Basic Education, said he was happy that the commitment of the two organisations to rehabilitate the Mbalè Government Primary School was met. The Minister was happy to receive the keys of the new classrooms. Handing them over to the Divisional Delegate for Education, she had this to say: *“Mr Delegate, I want you to ensure an appropriate use of this structure to boost the education of the young child in this remote area”*.

“Mbalè” in one of the Cameroonian local languages means *“the truth”*. For many of approximately 300 pupils at this school, the ceremony that day was a dream come true. The story goes as far back as 2006 when UNICEF partnered with MTN, one of the leading telecommunications companies in Cameroon, to support the Child Friendly School Initiative. A memorandum of understanding signed by UNICEF and MTN called for the provision of potable water and adequate latrines in three schools and for the refurbishment of Mbalè’s school as part of Child Friendly-Girl Friendly Schools Initiatives.



The new Mbalè Government Primary School

The refurbishment of the school was completed at the beginning of September this year and cost US \$ 36,000. Mr Oussoumanou is the

headmaster and the only officially employed teacher in the school. He is assisted by a teacher hired by the community. The completion of the refurbishment of the school is also a dream come true for him because the Minister pledged to assign additional teachers to the school. “My heart is full of joy. I pray the almighty to bless UNICEF and MTN and give them enough means to continue to take care of the poor children” said he. Mr Oussoumanou indicated that the new classrooms and more teachers will boost the enrolment of children in school, particularly girls from the village and from the vicinity.

Mbalè is a village in the *Adamaoua* province, one of the three northern provinces of Cameroon where the level of student enrollment in school is the lowest in Cameroon. Sociocultural barriers in this part of the country also contribute to even lower levels of enrollment for girls. Those provinces have been targeted in the new programme of cooperation between Cameroon and UNICEF (2008-2012). During its implementation, resources will be mobilised to enhance parental education and encourage the enrollment of young children in school in these provinces.



Partners and local authorities lined up behind Ms Minister Adama, Minister of Basic Education (in blue)

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