

SOUTOUKOULE COMMUNITY BEHAVIOR CHANGE IN FAVOR OF GIRLS' EDUCATION

Through project's community mobilization activities, Soutoukoulé community adopted a positive attitude towards girls' education.



Photo : USAID/GLEE

Students in the classroom in Khouloun Commune

"I have been very closely following the GLEE project's work in the commune and in surrounding villages. I think it's one of the best initiatives in this area. I wish that the next school year the project open four accelerating schooling centres in Soutoukoulé".

- Moussa Sissoko,
Mayor of
Soutoukoulé

Soutoukoulé is one of the few villages in the Khouloun commune of Kayes that has not welcomed the arrival of the USAID Girls Leadership and Empowerment through Education (GLEE) Project to the region. In fact, when GLEE staff arrived in this commune—known as a place where gold mines rule above all activities—the project's message of "girls leadership and empowerment through education" was poorly received by many villages, including Soutoukoulé. The reason was that cultural beliefs in this part of Mali assume girls should only do household tasks and be obedient to their husbands during all their life. Once they arrived in the villages—except Soutoukoulé—the dedicated GLEE staff started educating and informing communities on the importance of girls' education. Soon after the project started to open accelerated school centers.

After only nine months, GLEE has made visible improvements in Soutoukoulé neighboring villages. More than 35 girls between 10-14 years got enrolled in the second year of the accelerated schooling center in the neighboring village of Aroudyala and 16 teachers and facilitators trained in topics like gender based violence. In another village, Khouloun, there has been a decrease of delinquency in the village school. As for the village of Medine, it has become a happier place for adolescents now that they are all enrolled to the accelerating schooling centers.

The project also sponsored radio programs on the importance of girls' education and other issues related to their education. Moreover girls know where to go and with whom to share personal issues as they have received training on those subjects. After seeing these positive developments in neighboring communities, the leaders from Soutoukoulé village have started reconsidering their antipathy to girls and adolescents' education and the opportunity girls' education can offer in their future life.

The community leaders of Soutoukoulé, the mayor and the city council as well as the school principal requested a meeting with the project staff to open an accelerating schooling center in the coming school year. On June 11, 2019, Soutoukoulé village held a general assembly to discuss that issue.

For the mayor of Khouloun, it is the first time in the history of this commune that a project had managed to mobilize and educate so many people around an activity focused on empowering and educating girls' lifetime. "Now that the opportunity to be enrolled into school has been offered to me, I do not want to miss the chance to get some education. My dream is to become a teacher ", explained Wassa Fane, 10 years old student.

"Today our community understand the importance of education through the ways GLEE project explained it and through achievements we have seen in the surrounding villages", explains Moussa Sissoko, the Mayor of Soutoukoulé

That strong commitment of this community to the principles of GLEE Project is due the impactful achievements of the project in the commune of Khouloun, including educational radio broadcasts, and community meetings to discuss the importance of education. Community mobilization is most effective when included in a package of interventions with clearly set objectives and strategies, as applied by GLEE. By identifying communities who are "early adopters" helps other, more skeptical communities, overcome their fears and hesitation to change.

Launched in 2018, this five-year Leadership and Empowerment through Education Project will focus on providing substantial training to teachers to improve children's learning, to school managers to improve transparency and accountability, and to parents and community members to support girls' access to learning and hold local schools accountable. GLEE will enroll more than 19,968 out-of-school girls aged 10-14 years in formal schools and ensure the retention and transition of 61,390 adolescent girls, aged 10-18 years, in primary and secondary school in Kayes and Mopti Regions.