



Rural Africa Children's Education Trust

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New Learning Centre at Ipollo Secondary School

In February 2024, RACET Trustees returned to the Yala area of Cross River State, Nigeria on their first proper inspection trip since the pandemic. Despite near daily communication with RACET's Head of Operations **Ayo Gbadebo** in Ntrigom, it was wonderful for Trustees to see first-hand how RACET staff at the three secondary schools were managing to keep everything running smoothly. The significant challenges of recent years include school closures due to the pandemic, strikes in the state educational sector, and now a crumbling economy marked by 30% inflation and a severely devalued currency. Attracting and retaining teaching staff in these rural communities continues to be difficult as well.

The Government Secondary School at Ipollo, one of three schools where RACET is active, has long struggled with lack of investment in its infrastructure, which made it unsuitable for hosting a RACET Learning Centre.

However, following discussions between RACET and Cross River State education authorities, a new classroom block featuring a secure space for the Learning Centre was finally opened in the autumn of last year. RACET organised the installation of solar panels for the Centre by local suppliers.

British Airways generously provided Trustees with extra luggage allowance for 10 sets of computers, monitors and keyboards to set up the new Ipollo Learning Centre.



RACET trustees and staff set up and inaugurated the new Ipollo Learning Centre in February 2024.

At the inauguration ceremony, leaders from the surrounding communities expressed their gratitude for this significant investment in the education of their children. They generously offered a night security guard to deter any theft of the precious resource, which RACET gratefully accepted.

After nearly two decades of violence and turmoil in this area, RACET has been able to give a new energy of hope and belief in the future of Ipollo's children through education as the best way to break the cycle of rural poverty.



RACET welcomed dignitaries from the State Government and local villages to the inauguration of the Ipollo Learning Centre in February.

University Graduates Pave the Way to Success



Micah Obaji, age 12 in 2015, then a RACET student at Ntrigom Community Secondary School.



RACET congratulates Micah on completing his degree in Medical Biochemistry at CRUTECH in 2024. Pictured with Durojaye Micheal, head of Ipollo Learning Centre, and Trustee Mary Ann Perasso.

As part of the recent inspection trip, Trustees caught up with the 21 RACET university students currently studying on three campuses in Cross River State, in addition to our four recent graduates. The first RACET university scholars were enrolled in 2017, and each year since then has seen more students gain admission to university. Currently 10 of the 21 students are young women pursuing courses including Radiography, Microbiology, Business Administration, Accounting, and Economics among others.

Our first two female graduates recently obtained degrees in Biochemistry and English, while the other male graduates obtained degrees in Medical Biochemistry. Soon to begin their year of obligatory service in the National Youth Service Corps, they will be stationed at schools in other parts of Nigeria to serve as teachers and experience life there in what is meant to be a cultural exchange within a single country. They will begin looking for employment once their service is complete.

Although RACET provides financial assistance with tuition, textbooks, housing, academic expenses and a mobile phone, families are asked to contribute food staples and a bit of spending money to keep their students going. In an effort to save money and pool resources for the students, RACET tries to rent accommodation where they can stay together in groups. In Calabar, for example, the charity rents two very basic bungalows which house 16 students. They are happy to be in a community with long-time friends from their villages where they can focus and support each other in their studies. This arrangement helps smooth the transition from rural village life to the pressures of academia in a big city, but, like students everywhere, the budget is tight with no room for frills.

It was also very gratifying to meet with former students from the three secondary schools supported by RACET who had made it to university without financial help from RACET, but who had benefitted from the resources in the Learning Centres to prepare for the computerised university entrance exams (JAMB).

This trend is a clear signal that RACET's work is having a positive ripple effect on the communities by paving the way and showing what is possible. Parents in a small village see their neighbour's child succeeding and suddenly they realise their child has that potential too – to gain skills for professional careers to better provide for themselves and their families in future, and thereby break the cycle of rural poverty.

Sixteen Years of RACET Milestones



2008: Mrs Elizabeth Clifford of Weald, Sevenoaks, approached friends and parishioners at St. Thomas of Canterbury in Sevenoaks to support 12 students at three rural secondary schools in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Pictured here in Ntrigom on their first day of Junior Secondary school in September 2008: Lucy (age 11) and Linda (age 12), both due to graduate from University end 2024. Lucy in Radiography and Linda in Animal Science & Environmental Biology.

2009: The Rural Africa Children's Education Trust was formed and recognised by the UK Charity Commission. Registration No. 1127759.

2012: First visit to Ntrigom area by RACET Trustee Mary Ann Perasso.

2016: Inauguration of the Sir Brandon Gough Learning Centre, comprised of a computer suite and library powered entirely by solar panels, at the Ntrigom Community Secondary School.

2017: RACET hires first paid member of staff in Nigeria: Mr Ayo Gbadebo as Head of Operations, and first secondary school graduates admitted to university, funded by RACET sponsors in the UK.

2019: RACET extends provision of sanitary towels to all female secondary school students.

2020: Inauguration of the second Learning Centre, located at Comprehensive Secondary School, Mfuma. Implementation of the VIN Club Bursary, which has assisted 150 secondary students.

2024: Inauguration of the third and final Learning Centre at Government Secondary School, Ipollo. First four RACET university students graduate.



In 2023, RACET supplied a much-needed minibus to primarily help transport students to register in person for external exams (where students must provide biometric data) and on the exam days as well.

To avoid costly repairs due to poor roads and unpaved rural tracks, the minibus does not transport students to their homes in the villages. Rather, it is mainly used to take students and supplies between the schools when necessary.

Pictured here in Calabar with some of RACET's university students in February.

Enviro Loos Upgrade Sanitation at Ipollo School

RACET would like to extend a very big thank you to **Andrew LaTrobe** of Sevenoaks for his very generous gift of seven Enviro Loo units to provide much needed improvements in sanitation across the three schools.

Made in South Africa, the Enviro Loo system requires no water or plumbing, but rather uses a combination of enzymes and a simple ventilation process for breaking down and drying the fecal residues very hygienically with no odours.

Three units were installed at Mfuma School (2019), two installed at Ntrigom School (2020), while Ipollo School has received the final two units (2024), which are now up and running.

These units provide hygiene, privacy and safety for students and staff alike, who previously had to relieve themselves in the overgrown and dilapidated latrines pictured to the right.

Along with the provision of sanitary towels to all senior secondary school girls, the Enviro Loos have been especially important for our successful campaign to keep girls in school every day of the month.

Andrew also fundraised to cover the shipping expenses from South Africa and installation. All 705 students plus staff across the three schools are very grateful to him.

www.enviro-loo.com.

If this newsletter is your first introduction to RACET, please visit our website at www.racet.org for further information. Feeling inspired to volunteer your skills with RACET in the UK? We would love some help with our social media accounts as well as in other areas. Please call Mary Ann Perasso (Secretary) on 01959 522337 to learn more.



This block of Enviro Loo toilets now provides a clean and safe place to go to the toilet.



Prior to the Enviro Loo, these crumbling latrines were the only infrastructure available. Most students and staff avoided using them due to fear of snakes.



Providing sanitary towels to female students and Enviro Loos at each secondary school have been major contributors to their improved attendance and academic performance.